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RECOVERING AESTHETICS IN TEACHING:  
BEAUTY INFORMED WITH LOVE

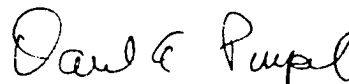
by

Phoebe M. Levine

A Dissertation Submitted to  
the Faculty of The Graduate School at  
The University of North Carolina at Greensboro  
in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Philosophy

Greensboro  
1995

Approved by



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Dissertation Advisor

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## APPROVAL PAGE

This dissertation has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of The Graduate School at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

Dissertation Advisor David C. Purpel  
Committee Members Thomas L. ...  
Robert A. Rice  
L. J. Murphy

3-21-95  
Date of Acceptance by Committee  
3-21-95  
Date of Final Oral Examination

LEVINE, PHOEBE M. , Ph. D. Recovering Aesthetics in Teaching:  
Beauty Informed with Love (1995)  
Directed by Dr. David E. Purpel. 146 pp.

This dissertation looks at teaching through an aesthetic lens that brings the classroom into focus as a living composition of active and loving relationship. As the dimension of its form unfolds, it reveals the full and inclusive nature of aesthetics: that which embraces and celebrates the design of a teacher as a loving artist within the space of the classroom.

The first chapter begins by holding the context of this learning space up to the light of the current trends in educational reform. The aesthetic voice confronts methodical systems that market step by step teaching practices. Teacher-as-artist questions whether mandated goals and objectives of efficient instruction muffle the learning sounds of awe and wonder.

The voices of educators from a variety of disciplines are heard in Chapter II as they consider the presence of artistry in all classrooms. The composition of this chapter reveals that so much more than mastery of subject matter goes on within these rooms where students and teachers come together everyday to learn with and from one another. It recovers the active etymological root of the noun, "classroom," transforming it into a summoning or calling to make room for possibility and change.

Chapter III explores and recovers the meaning of aesthetic design within the canvas of the classroom. It helps distinguish creative order from

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regimented orderliness as it reveals the concept of teaching as a form of art. This chapter sets the stage for the storytelling of Chapter IV where three kindergarten teachers talk about the everydayness of their classrooms. The language of these teachers paints a portrait of a spiritual form of art making - teachers and students working together within the nurturing and reciprocal spaces of classrooms as works of art.

As Chapter V weaves the fragile yet resilient fibers of care and compassion within this aesthetic fabric of relationship, the substance of its material unfolds to recover and behold teacher-as-loving-artist. Then, like a river flowing into the vastness of a sea that can always welcome and hold more, the final pages of this dissertation begin to feel the tension and tug of primordial currents that turn again and again toward re-creation and something anew.



## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Ten years ago Roberta Rice awakened my curiosity about the aesthetic nature of the teacher/student relationship as she guided me through my M.Ed. in Art Education. Five years later she turned me toward this path where I would continue to explore the ineffable spiritual nature of teacher-as-artist. I thank Roberta for helping me begin my doctoral journey.

In the summer of 1992 I took my first class with Fritz Mengert. It is interesting that this course, titled Love, Imagination, and Educated Thought, not only led me into the Cultural Studies Department but also became the grounding of my dissertation. Fritz challenged me through five semesters of course work in classrooms where the windows were always open to make room for educated and creative thoughtfulness. I thank Fritz for pushing me when I was resistant to consider Hegel and Heidegger - writers who have brought out some of my best thinking and connections.

Dee Irwin has been my patient and accepting mentor. I cherish my visits with her and her thoughtful contemplation of my thoughts. My time in her classrooms helped me revisit my roots and come to know and begin to celebrate my whole self as a teacher and an artist. I thank Dee for her genuine care that has kept me grounded whenever I came to difficult crossroads in my program and life.

My time in Kathleen Casey's classrooms liberated my writing as she invited me to speak in multi-media language. I thank Kathleen for helping me celebrate the excitement of creative engagement with my readings and my studies.

When I started meeting with David Purpel I misspelled his name on my first official doctoral form, using the familiar art spelling, "purple" and now, two years later, I recently caught myself misspelling the name of the color, "purpel." Early on in our meetings David suggested that I use art media to help me language my thoughts. He never once questioned my need to collect and work with stone and rock arrangements. David helped me rearrange the stones that cluttered and often blocked the threshold of my teacher-as-artist space. I thank David for stirring many quiet, poignant connections that helped me recover myself as loving artist.

When two or more come together to celebrate learning, we create a spiritual blend. I thank my many students from kindergarten through college for the joy, energy, and challenge they have given so freely to me.

I can always count on my husband Jerry for honest feedback. His presence, like my stones and rocks, keeps me grounded to the joys, struggles, and passions of coming to know. I thank Jerry for his steady support and love.

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## CHAPTER I

### THE PAUSE

This dissertation dwells within a very common space called the classroom, and the problem with common spaces is their tendency to fade into backgrounds of mediocrity and complacency. My studies, research, and writing work at pulling the context of the classroom as a place of learning out into the open and taking a closer look at the nature of its design. What does this kind of room look like, sound like, feel like? What are its dimensions? What kind of people come together within its parameters? What actually goes on in this designated place where teachers and students meet almost every day within the halls of our educational institutions? All too often I catch only a glimpse. All too often I stand at the doorway of a room full of people who seem to be sitting passively on a dull surface, oblivious to the undisturbed dust of prescribed, bland orderliness, unaware of their potential response-ability to look for or ask for more in this picture of their learning. Where is the energy? Where are the creative spaces of spontaneous encounters? Like a quiet, invisible student, many of these orderly, mundane classrooms sit unnoticed and unquestioned as they take silent hold along the corridors of our schools.

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My graduate studies have called me to the confines of these rooms to take notice of and question the nature of their contents. It is interesting that the word class comes from two Greek words, *klesis* meaning a calling or summons, and *kalein* meaning to call. And I find in the Oxford English Dictionary that one meaning of the word room is “opportunity - a scope or opening for something by which it is rendered possible.” I feel summoned to these familiar classroom spaces where I have spent so much of my life both as student and teacher. I feel called upon to answer a tacit belief that so much more lies within the dimensions of this room. My chapters will hold the meaning I make as I rummage through the voices of other educators and arrange them within the context of my experience. The beginning of this dissertation process is similar to cleaning out and reorganizing an over crowded attic. Each new old-dust-covered box holds the promise of meaningful connections. I often feel overwhelmed as I poke through and sort all these bits and pieces and struggle to arrange them in my mind and on these pages so that you, the reader, can understand. As the contents of certain boxes carry my attention down other paths, I have to continue to remind myself of my focus - materializing the presence of art making in all classrooms.

### The Aesthetics of the Classroom

I want to go below the surface of the common, ordinary classroom to find its extraordinary potential. An important resource tool in the process of

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this search is the nature of myself as artist and art teacher as I focus on the context of the classroom through my aesthetic lens. Aesthetics is one of those ineffable words people use, hoping that no one will ask for a definition. I find that it comes from the Greek word, *aisthesis*, meaning sensation or perceptible by feeling. Aesthetics is not a static noun or an elite label that is selectively bestowed on a limited number of beautiful, exclusive things. It is a condition of being-in-relation that lives within the breath of another's response. It dwells within the perception of the innate beauty of meeting. A painting (be)comes to aesthetic life only in that instant when its beauty is perceived by another. It is that space of connecting conversation between beholder and beheld. Aesthetics is my recognition of the presence of a working design within something I behold. This something does not have to be confined to an art classroom or a fine arts museum. The beauty of aesthetics is its enhancement and celebration of both the uncommon and the everyday; or I prefer to say, it seeks out the one-and-only-ness of the everydayness in our lives.

Aesthetics is a way of knowing the world, a condition of being in experience, an attitude of attentiveness. I wash and dry my dishes aesthetically when I notice the rhythm and pattern of my actions and become aware of the physical elements (color, texture, shape, sound, feel) and design of myself in relation to what and how I am attending to this daily, often mundane activity. An avid football fan becomes aesthetically aware of the

beauty of the design of a play as the players on both teams work and move in relation to one another against the backdrop of the stadium setting. There exists a pattern, a rhythm in the movement when all the parts come together to create an awareness of the design of a unified whole.

The problem with many of our classrooms is the tight, predictable weave of their surface. These places of learning contain no room for open spaces that summon and nurture the coming together of aesthetic meetings. In my dissertation work I try to locate so as to loosen the unnecessary tension in the threads that bind the flow of creative movement and aesthetic connection between teachers, students, and their environment.

### Teaching as an Art

This dissertation redefines the nature of teaching and the role of teacher. The title, teacher-as-artist tells me that artistry stands ready to come alive in all teachers whenever they leave dead-ended lesson plans outside the door and bring themselves to the classroom. Teachers-as-artists make room for the possible in class. They recognize and work with the pattern of learning as their students move in relation to one another and the material of the classroom. Teachers-as-artists work with and stretch the medium of their students. I have always been fascinated by the nature of the relationship between teachers and students as I explored the tension of those magical spaces in the classroom. Padgham (1979) addresses this relationship between teacher and learner from the perspective of twentieth-century art theories.



He places the cubists' multi-dimensional perspectives within the space and time of "the dialectical process wherein as 'man [sic] shapes the world. . . the world also shapes man'" (Huebner, cited in Padgham, p. 162) . Padgham (1979) pulls artists and educators together in the same space of this article to celebrate the wholeness of their parts. He affirms the art of the teaching experience with the words of Itten:

What I can describe of my teaching activity appears to me poor compared with what actually happened during my work in the classroom. The intonation, the rhythm, the sequence of words, time, and place, the intellectual conditions of the students, all the other circumstances which create a dynamic atmosphere cannot be recreated; but this is the very medium which helps to produce this creative climate... . Education is a bold venture - particularly in the arts, because it involves the creative spirit of man. (Itten, cited in Padgham, p. 166)

Vivian Paley and Kathe Jervis (1986) talk about the "teacher's craft" (Jervis, p. 132) , pulling on these threads of artistry that make meaningful connections between teachers and students. Paley reminds us that our purpose is not to teach about the subject but to listen to our children. The aesthetic experience of "show and tell" used so often in elementary classrooms helps us create community collages as we link one person's observations to others, using the glue of intertextuality and the threads of common experiences. As Jervis observed a fifth-grade classroom for an extended period of time, she discovered that the teacher and her students could not be separated in the composition of the classroom design. This

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wholistic process was such that she could not observe the teacher without simultaneously listening to the students.

Teaching as an art forms the shape of the classroom into an open-ended space that reaches far beyond its walls. Robert Henri (1923) describes teacher-as-artist.

When the artist is alive in any person, whatever his [sic] kind of work may be, he becomes an inventive, daring, self-expressing creature. He becomes interesting to other people. He disturbs, upsets, enlightens, and he opens ways for a better understanding. Where those who are not artists are trying to close the book, he opens it, and shows there are still more pages possible. . . . He does not have to be a painter or sculptor to be an artist. He can work in any medium. (p. 5)

The problem. What is the problem? We pass by classrooms silenced by the idling drone of state mandated goals and objectives. We see students stuck between the empty spaces of the seven-point lesson plan, and surfeited by the barrage of given answers at the end of each chapter in the textbooks: But is this blatant, taut surface the real problem? I believe that the real problem lies hidden beneath this tightly stretched canvas of standardized, outcome-based education.

### Closed Doors and Covered Windows

The real problem is our institutional distrust of human nature, our institutional fear of human potential. What will happen if human beings are given the freedom to think, to speak, and to act? Will they mix up the order of the classroom if they are set free? How can we trust that our teachers and

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students will make the “right” choices and give the right answers? Like the Grand Inquisitor in Dostoyevsky’s The Brothers Karamazov (1958), perhaps it is in our best interests that we relieve ourselves of this human burden called free will. Perhaps it is in the best interest of our culture that we keep the “bad side” of human nature in check. This need to control, this fear of potential evil beings suffocates the human spirit. Harnessing our innate need to know and to question redirects and smolders the power of wonder and anticipation. The “daily grind” (Jackson, 1968) of mindless tasks leads to boredom and lethargy in this narrow and confining space. Claude Steele (1992) talks about how students subjected to remediation programs are reminded over and over of their disabilities and lack of the substance to learn. Devalued as humans, they continue to live up to this downward spiral that deprograms their potential to hope and to dream.

Students in these rooms are not alone. They are led by teachers and administrators who have been stored and preserved inside these depersonalized institutions of education alongside teacher-proof lesson plans, generic textbooks, and dead-ended curriculums. I once watched a custodian wheel a hand truck down the hall of my elementary school, delivering a large carton to one of the classrooms. The oversized corrugated box carried a bold label that shouted, “KNOWLEDGE AT YOUR FINGERTIPS!” Pretty amazing message that we are given by our publishing companies. Perhaps boxes like these contain the “necessary” ingredients for acculturation and socialization.

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Perhaps they place the “right” conditioning techniques conveniently and painlessly at many teachers’ fingertips. But for teachers who seek the truth of their students these boxes of knowledge clutter and stifle the open spaces of the classroom. They close the doors and cover the windows of our learning.

The potential for creative knowledge is rooted deep down inside us. Underneath this tightly woven surface of standard methodology runs the resilient threads of students who are able to feel control, responsibility, and ownership for the making of their knowledge. When disabled teachers come to realize that the boxes of knowledge live inside all their students, they become able to uncover and recover vast storehouses within the walls of their classrooms.

### Latching onto Panacea Paradigms

Last week I listened to a panel of politicians and educators commenting on the condition of our public schools. The panel was part of a three-day lecture series commemorating the 40th anniversary of Brown vs. the Board of Education, Topeka, Kansas. And still in 1994 we continue to meet, to discuss, and to struggle with the question of how to change the direction of our schools.

A woman in the audience mentioned the name of psychiatrist, James Comer and how his writings were making a positive mark on some of our schools. A member of the school board explained how Comer defines the

school as an extended family unit that uses faculty and parent management teams working together to build and foster a child centered place of learning.

And then I heard that pervasive suffix. Whenever the letters “ized” are tacked onto the end of a word I begin to worry. And there it was again. We were told that several of our schools in Guilford County were being “Comerized.” Sounds pretty foreboding doesn’t it? Not only to us but probably also to Dr. Comer. That’s because when something or someone is “ized,” all its freely moving parts are frozen into a simplistic, plastic mold. Once again, a well-meaning school system latches onto the panacea paradigm. The promising theories of an educator/researcher are deconstructed and mandated underneath a “one-size-fits-all,” generic label. Our curriculum specialists take a workable idea and press it into a prefabricated, teacher-proof methodological brand-named box and dispense it to every classroom. Staff development runs its teachers through a regimented, step-by-step, standardized process that turns out well trained automatons. Throughout the school year announced and unannounced observers enter the classrooms as depersonalized instruments that measure the degree of accuracy and conformity to the procedures and resulting product. If only we can formularize and dispense this person’s ideas in an efficient, standardized way, then our system will be cured. We want instant, predetermined results. James Comer offers us some very helpful theories, but how we practice the

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nine functions of his management tool determines the life or death of creative learning inside our classrooms.

### Step by Step Marches

I worked in the trenches of elementary classrooms throughout the 1980s when we Madeleine Hunterized our curriculums within the rigid spaces of her seven-point lesson plan. Hunter's theory is rooted in the concept that effective teacher instruction will produce student success. Her seven steps provide the necessary grounding where teachers are required to make a deliberate plan to produce student achievement. Even though Hunter does state that certain elements of her seven points can be either included or excluded, this option usually slides into the shadows of her clearly mandated procedures, accented by the absoluteness of her language.

As an art teacher I learned that presenting any lesson in a step-by-step format is comparable to a paint-by-number generic landscape scheme. The landscapes and the lessons show us a bland, impersonal view of learning. In order to see the absurdity of this type of planning, I want to march through the seven steps against the backdrop of an aesthetic improvisational setting. The passages in quotes were taken from a worksheet used in a teacher training session in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools in 1984.

**(1) The Anticipatory Set "elicits attending behavior (deliberate focus) and a mental readiness or set for the following instruction."**

For me, this language elicits an image of a group of students who have put

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away all of their individual selves in order to stand at the attention of their teacher's agenda. Hunter goes on to say that this **"portion of instructional time"** should be only long enough to accomplish the current focusing objective. Throughout this march we hear the constant beat of the efficient, time-on-task drum hurrying us along lest we fall out of step. The natural rhythm of my aesthetic movement is interrupted over and over by the predictable, repetitive pounding of this pervasive beat. Hunter is calling both teachers' and students' undivided attention to a divided, separated piece of a whole. My work in aesthetics informs me that parts exist only in relation to the whole. If I separate my work piecemeal, its meaning becomes diffused and unrecognizable.

(2) The Objective and Its Purpose is the assigned space where the teacher **"informs the student what he will be able to do by the end of instruction and why that accomplishment is important, useful, and relevant" to his life.** I'm finding it difficult to believe that these "points" were reified in the 1980s. We followed without question, just as expected of our students. Hunter goes on to give an example: **"You were slowed down yesterday because you had trouble with . . . . Today you are going to practice to develop more speed and greater accuracy."** The nature of my aesthetic thinking tells me that it is impossible and limiting for me to know exactly what my student will be able to do by the end of instruction. If our scientists,

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social scientists, and artists had followed Hunter's plan, we would have no mystery, no awe, and no wonder in our world.

(3) **Instructional Input** holds the formula in which the teacher identifies the necessary information and means by which to "get it into the students' heads." Again, my aesthetic voice questions: where is the wonder? where are the spontaneous, unplanned moments of discovery? These kinds of input cannot be planned and put into students' heads. These insights come from within ourselves.

(4) **Modeling** "helps the students not only know about, but also see examples of an acceptable finished product or process." My aesthetic eye wonders how many students' finished products will be a carbon copy of the teacher's acceptable example. These defined endings cancel all aesthetic, creative journeys.

(5) **Checking for Understanding** answers the question: Do the students possess the essential information and skills in order to do what the teacher has planned for them to accomplish? This step works by drilling the students, making certain that they know how to give back the right answer. As an art teacher, I have difficulty finding only one right answer to my questions. The beauty of art making is its ability to produce as many right answers as there are children in the classroom.

(6) **Guided Practice** instills the notion of teacher rightness. "The teacher . . . makes sure the instruction has "taken" before turning students

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loose to practice independently.” Hunter stresses here that “beginning stages of learning are critical in determination of future successful performance [to insure accuracy and success].” My question is: “How do we define student success?” Hunter answers: “Once a student can perform without major errors, discomfort or confusion, he [sic] is ready to develop fluency by practicing without the teacher.” Perhaps I was asking the wrong question? I thought we were in a classroom, not a factory assembly line turning out rows and rows of flawless automatons. The art of teaching values students’ authentic, thoughtful responses and insights rather than rapid delivery of bulk material.

(7) Independent Practice as implied above is the time when students show off how well they have received, processed, and are able to give back this carefully packaged knowledge. I must end this review of the steps with Madeleine Hunters’ final advice to her teachers-in-training:

**Simply “knowing” the seven steps in planning for effective instruction will not ensure that those steps are implemented with artistry. And simply having an “artistic knack with kids” will not ensure that the elements that promote successful learning are included in instructional planning. Both the science and the art of teaching are essential. Deliberate consideration of the seven elements which can promote effective instruction constitutes the launching pad for student attainment in stratospheres of success never before thought possible.**

My aesthetic voice is initially at loss to respond to this message. It’s like asking someone to build a Baroque sand castle with an army shovel. How

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does one go about **deliberately considering the implementation** of artistry?

Hunter has turned both science and art into objectified over-the-counter products applied to our classrooms with “artistic knack” to insure prescribed student success.

I spoke earlier about our unquestioning acceptance as teachers-in-training. Where was my critical consciousness in the 1980s? Where were the voices of teachers who spent six hours a day rubbing elbows with energetic elementary children? We were silenced and muffled beneath the heavy steps of this very **effective** plan. I can recall several times when my teaching was “observed” by an evaluator who cited “non-compliant students” in my classroom (i.e., those students who chose to move beyond the edges of my art lesson). At those times I heard my voice underneath the evaluation instrument saying, “Well, if self-expression means being non-compliant, then I’m grateful that I have non-compliant students.” In the 1980s these Hunterized steps were stamped throughout the hallways of our schools. The elements of chance, unexpected outcomes, and possibility seemed covered by this tightly woven blanket of planned certainty.

And now ten years later we feel the heavy, stifling weight of OBE - Outcome-Based Education hanging over our schools. James Moffett (1994) takes a closer look and questions this “old false analogy that running schools is like manufacturing and marketing commodities.” He reminds us that “. . . comparing human growth to factory production implies the putting

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together of inert parts . . . [and] applies an inorganic, particle approach to an organic, holistic process” (p. 587) . Politicians and business leaders hold firmly to this production agenda that sends our students, teachers, and administrators down narrow, shallow assembly lines of learning.

Gretchen Schwartz (1994) shares my negative response to the language of OBE. Like me, she feels confined within the strict beat of its linearity. Her voice echoes and clarifies my thoughts when I hear her say that “advocates of outcome-based education use mechanistic terminology suggestive of the business world, not organic words that speak of reflection, serendipity, and discovery” (p. 87) . In our classrooms we are dealing with warm human bodies, not cold, inert fabrications.

### Answering With My Aesthetic Voice

How do I answer the sound of these loud, controlling educational reform movements? Only with my aesthetic voice. Many call to us and tell us how to teach. We must consider very carefully the nature of our response. Teachers-as-artists can dismantle many of the mechanical components of programmed learning. Teaching as an art softens the hard surface of methodology as teachers learn to push and pull on its stiff elements, breathing their own life and that of their students into its structure. Teachers-as-artists keep the doors and windows of their classroom open to new possibility and change. They refuse to stay in line and follow behind the step-by-step regimen. Teachers-as-artists learn how to work both within and

beyond the system because they are able to stay in touch with their own voice and the voices of their students.

This dissertation works to soften the sound and humanize the language in our institutions of learning. I believe we can do this by recovering the presence of aesthetics out from under the oppressive drumming of mechanical, efficient goals and objectives. Is it possible to nurture emergent subjectives instead of assessing mandated objectives in our classrooms? I believe it is already being done in many classrooms, especially on the kindergarten level. Recovering aesthetics is about classroom-as-art-studio: a place where creative process is more important than finished products. An aesthetic experience makes room for unplanned encounters between teachers, students, and their media. A classroom-as-studio gives teachers and students an environment receptive to possibility and change.

One metaphor I use throughout my writing is "the fabric of teaching." I think of teaching as a multidimensional piece of fabric that lies across the surface of the classroom. The problem is that it has been resting too long in one position. This writing is my attempt to pick up this piece of cloth covered by the dust of rote procedures and behaviors and shake it out. I want to uncover and recover the life that lies hidden beneath the wrinkles and folds of standardization in our classrooms. I want to help other teachers come to know this space we call the classroom as an ongoing opportunity for new and extended possibilities for learning.

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This dissertation is a multi-dimensional piece of art work that speaks of relationship and recovery within the context of classroom teaching. In my search I want to recover the intrinsic aesthetic elements of classroom teaching that lie hidden inside each of us and within the spaces of our relationships. This is a living art project, created on a human scale, using my working relationships with the students and teachers in my life. As we draw, paint, sculpt, and weave the experiences of our past into the surface of our present, we begin to awaken the spiritual and aesthetic blend of teaching and learning. Students as teachers, teachers as students become the colors, textures, shapes, and lines working together in the relationship of art making as we create a sculpture, mobile, painting, drawing, or collage that is never finished but always pictures the meaning making of our lives.

For the last fourteen years, the focus for this dissertation has been within my reach but beyond my grasp as I watched and experienced the magic blend of art making and young children. I held parts of it in my M.Ed. studies in 1986 when I created life-sized woven sculptural forms that spoke of my passionate feelings about the teacher-student relationship within the walls of my elementary art rooms. But I needed more time to experience and process the daily making of the weave. Now is the time and here is the place in the design of my life to reach down, pick up, and behold this fascinating, mysterious piece of multi-dimensional fabric that I call teaching. The art of teaching stretches and drapes itself across all the classrooms in our daily

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living. It is not confined to a hierarchy of elite, isolated people, places, subjects, or experiences. Instead the art of teaching and the aesthetics of our classrooms live and move within the common threads of our everyday experiences. Dewey (1934) defines "the nature of the problem: that of recovering the continuity of esthetic experience with normal processes of living" (p. 10) .

My writing speaks of the classroom as an aesthetic composition in which each of its parts has a voice that speaks to the wholeness of its design. As I immerse myself within the rhythmic weave of my search, I listen for pauses that speak softly and pull me toward the "realization of what is not yet" (Greene, 1984, p. 134) . I listen for voices of those who came before and steady the foundation of my walk. I awaken myself to the sounds of my everyday experiences.

This dissertation is my response to the "tiny whispering sound" (1 Kings 19: 11-13) that leads me on a wholistic journey of recovering that which is within me. Like a piece of fabric, the threads of my writing will flow throughout the dimensions of the whole piece. The words and images will weave over and under the edges of the chapters as they draw all the ways of knowing into an aesthetic, spiritual wholeness of the meaning of teaching and learning.

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## CHAPTER II

### HEARING THE CALL

Dividing this dissertation into separate chapters is similar to freezing a Calder mobile. Separating and confining my thoughts to certain stable spaces restricts the necessary free movement of parts in relation to a whole. In Chapter V I will try to speak of this dialectic, aesthetic, relationship as a sculptor, potter, and painter as I move back and forth between the first four chapters to show them each as one and at the same time as a whole.

Chapter II tells my story of awakening to the sounds of other teachers-as-artists beyond my art room door. The voices of educators from other disciplines brush up against the well worn sounds of my art making and tug at the settled threads of my teaching.

I begin this chapter with the faithful listening of Elijah (1 Kings 19: 11-13). The Lord's voice does not arrive in a thunderous roar but as a tiny whispering sound. And when Elijah hears it, he hides his face in his cloak and stands at the entrance of the cave. I share Elijah's fear and anxiety of the unknown, but I also know the lifeless safety of sameness. I feel Elijah's touch of hesitancy as he faces the uncertain, almost inaudible sound at the entrance of the cave. But his faithful answer helps me move out into this space where

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I can join the voices of other teachers who speak of new possibilities in the room of our classes.

There was a Tiny Whispering Sound

Elijah came to a cave (from the mountain of God, Horeb), where he took shelter. Then the LORD said, "Go outside and stand on the mountain before the LORD; the LORD will be passing by." A strong and heavy wind was rending the mountains and crushing rocks before the LORD - but the LORD was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake - but the LORD was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake there was fire - but the LORD was not in the fire. After the fire there was a tiny whispering sound. When he heard this, Elijah hid his face in his cloak and went and stood at the entrance of the cave. (1 Kings 19: 11-13)

These words came to me as a soft, strong voice one August day in 1990 during a Saturday Mass at St. Anne's Catholic Church in Charlotte, North Carolina. The rhythm of their sound has lingered inside me like a distant, recurring tune that comes from somewhere deep inside. Why did I hear Elijah's conversation with God so clearly that late summer afternoon? More than often, the important voices in our lives come as quiet, certain whispers that draw us into new and uncertain territory. The whisper is always present within each of us waiting patiently for that pause, for an open space that welcomes it into the design of our lives. My writing speaks gently to the sound as I answer for those of us who are ready to hear and respond to the voice of meaning making in our lives as teachers.



### Within Calling Range

When I was young and played outdoors with my sister, my mother would remind us: “stay close enough so you can hear me call.” This chapter reminisces in some of those spaces of my teaching life where I have been within calling range, and it reminds me to stay close enough so that I can hear and respond to the otherness in my life.

The roots of this dissertation lead me back to the summer of 1985 when I met a very special teacher and writer named Lucy Calkins (1983). The words inside her blue soft-bound book called Lessons From a Child captured my heart and my mind as they opened and filled a tacit space within me. Was it because she was writing about a small rural school in New Hampshire, that her story touched many warm spots of my thirteen years of living and teaching in Maine? Whatever the connection, I became aware of the presence of an aesthetic, spiritual relationship with this woman and her personal message about how we learn from our children. Her words and images stirred a kind of emergent knowing within me. I experienced a sense of finding and claiming pieces of myself that had been covered with the dust of busy specialization and guarded isolation in my life as an itinerant art teacher. She was calling me to stand outside the “brackets of the ordinary” (Greene, 1984, p. 134) and catch a glimpse of its specialness. The threads of her thoughts about teaching writing moved into and enriched and strengthened the fabric of my art curriculum. But more importantly, her

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voice was tugging at a part of the fabric of my soul. I felt the sound of her message resonate within me “. . . evoked by the realization of what is not yet expressed in yearning towards possibility” (Greene, 1984, p. 134) . She called me to the edges of my art room. Her voice coaxed me to let go of my comfortable, known surroundings and move toward the unfamiliar, “hushed reverberations” (Santayana, cited in Dewey, 1934, p. 18) of aesthetics in other areas of our students’ learning. This small, gentle book was a tiny whisper, coming softly as it filled the aesthetic spaces of my life.

#### All-of-a-Piece

In August of 1985 I was halfway through my M.Ed. in Art Education when I became involved in a Teachers’ Writing Workshop. This inservice experience, named “Writing to Learn,” called forth teachers from a variety of disciplines and grade levels to focus on writing across all subject areas. It worked to rejoin the separated pieces of our curriculum underneath the wholistic umbrella of literacy.

Over this two-week period, as I engaged in the experiences of the writing workshop, I began to make important connections that gave me another language for my knowing and opened new spaces of possibilities in my carefully constructed framework of teaching and learning as an elementary art teacher. I heard the voice of Lucy Calkins (1983) who spoke of the art of emergent literacy of young children and urged me look at my art curriculum from a new perspective. Calkins’ research took her to a small

New Hampshire elementary school where she observed the daily writing behaviors of children over a two-year period. In her book, Lessons from a Child, she told me about “six year olds who built their stories much like they built their block constructions” (p. 12), and third grader Susie, “who was shaping her words as if they were clay” (p. 73) .

I read about first graders cutting, pasting, taping, and stapling their pages of text and drawings until they became collage stories as tall as their proud owners, in much the same way that I build a painting or a sculpture. And in this small New England school I met first grade teacher, Mary Ellen Giacobbe with whom I felt immediate kinship, because she believed just like me that all of our children are artists. On the first day of school she gave each of her five- and six-year-olds a bound blank book and her personal message of confidence: “This is for your writing. You can draw and you can write” (Giacobbe, cited in Calkins, 1983, p. 11) .

Here were reading and writing teachers telling me things that I instinctively knew but had never languaged. Their stories were giving new shape and form to the meaning of my life as a teacher. They were welcoming and validating “drawing” as an integral form of emergent literacy. This workshop was calling me and other teachers out of the linear spaces of our classrooms to gather in open, three-dimensional discourse. I could hear the words of teachers from other disciplines rounding out my role as a teacher and adding new texture and color to the language of my art curriculum.

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I began to hear myself within the voices of so many others who walked with me on this common ground of teaching. Here was a small voice that spoke to me and from me. Here was this tiny whisper that came from everywhere and nowhere. It came so softly I could not help but hear even its faintest whispers within the wholeness of its melody. For the first time, my life as a teacher and as an artist came together all-of-a-piece. I saw life inside the classroom as a piece of art work in process. The wholeness of its many pieces was gathering us all within the folds of this writers' workshop experience to recognize and claim ourselves: teachers-as-artists.

As I came to know and experience the intimate relationship of writing and drawing I could no longer think of these two disciplines as a separate "patchwork" in a child's learning. They were to become "all-of-a-piece" in my teaching and my life (Weaver, 1990, p. 219). What I didn't anticipate was that this multi-dimensional experience would not only shake and expand the roots of my art program but more importantly, it would change the design of my own fabric as a teacher.

I began to see the colors and textures of other subjects alive and working within the patterns of my teaching. I could no longer separate the threads of art from the whole piece of a child's learning. The art of teaching was calling me to hear its presences in other areas outside my classroom. I propped open my doors to allow other disciplines to move and mingle freely in this new space. Calkins (1983) talks about "... seeing the printed words

[of children's writings] . . . as the tip of the iceberg" (p. 21) . I also think of the art images of children as small but powerful pieces of each child, giving me an intimate glimpse of their wholeness. This inservice experience, like the iceberg, surfaced only a small portion of a challenging wholistic journey which would lead me down new paths as an artist, a teacher, and a student.

Reluctant to Follow . . . Without Knowing Where it Leads

The observational and experiential emphasis of this "Writing to Learn" process complemented and rounded out my own art teaching philosophy. Calkins' validation of the self expression of student responses provided affirming language for many strategies I used to help my own students speak from within themselves. The intensity of my personal engagement with writing over this two-week period challenged me to find ways to integrate it within my art program. When the new school year began, I invited my students to bring their writing voices into my art room. Often we would write before or after the art experience. My students began to feel comfortable using words as another art medium within the surface and meaning of their art work. I watched as the words and images came together within the surface of their art making and generating new forms of meaning making.

New pathways create expectant spaces in our lives. I can feel the tug at their edges pulling on my curiosity and questioning my fears and my faith. As we chose new directions in the classroom, my students and I followed the

safe and familiar paths at first, until we felt comfortable enough to wander toward the unknown bends.

I felt strongly enough about this new relationship of drawing and writing that I wrote and applied for a Special Projects Grant in the summer of 1987. This program which I named, "Sketchwords," grew out of my theory that young children need both words and images as tools to expand and enrich their vocabulary when they tell their stories. I envisioned working with and learning from small groups of students who would use sketchbooks both as journals and drawing pads to focus on and record personal observations.

In August when my principal called to tell me that my proposal had been accepted, I felt that brief moment of thrill and exhilaration, followed closely by that ever accompanying fear of "measuring up" to this new experience. Could and would this theory of mine work in practice with small groups of elementary children? Was it possible for a program grounded in subjective process to produce a valid objective product? In the weeks and months that followed, I learned to live with and accept the fear and uncertainty that goes with the responsibility of trying something new. I led my students down those unrecognizable paths of learning each week, often questioning the substance of our grounding. Could I trust my students to pick out the "right stuff" for themselves in these nontraditional surroundings? Quite literally one morning, two of my students returned from our nature

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walk clutching a handful of poison ivy leaves. As we scrubbed ourselves with soap and water I wondered what else we were gathering along these pathways.

I recall pre-dawn mornings when I would wake with fearful uncertainty about where to go next in this journey of learning. I kept the lyrics of a hymn by Bob Dufford, S.J. taped to the inside cover of my lesson plan book: "Be not afraid, I go before you always. Come follow me, and I will give you rest" (Isaiah 45: 2-3) . How much easier and safer it would have been to return to the halls of my assigned schools, teaching the prescribed art curriculum. But this program had called me. I had been within the range of its sound. My only certainty rest in the realization that I must listen for the voice of this new form of art making that kept calling me back to my classroom day after day.

I remember meeting with my first group of expectant children in September. I handed them a brown, spiral sketchbook and said, "This is your new art book. Take a look inside." The children leafed through the empty, white pages with questioning faces. They had never seen a wordless, pictureless textbook. "These pages are blank because they are waiting for your voice and your images. You are the author of this book that will tell about your thoughts, your questions, and your dreams." And here I stood on open ground, the author of this new, uncertain program that was asking me to

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commit my energies to a tacit belief that there is something more to uncover in the community of students and teachers making art together.

Madeleine Grumet languaged my feelings of uncertainty about the Sketchwords program when she wrote about “a child, wary of reading, reluctant to follow that line across the page without knowing where it leads. . . . it is fraught with danger, . . . as it leads us into the light as well as the darkness” (cited in Pinar, 1988, p. 459). One of the lights came in February when a third grade teacher shared with me her student’s beautifully written and illustrated social studies assignment.

“Are you teaching him how to do this in your art class?” she asked, emphasizing that until now this student’s performance in her classroom had been minimal. At that same time in Sketchwords, this student was working successfully on detailed drawings of toy trucks and planes and clay “sketches” of “boxers in a boxing ring.” I did not teach this child how to write and illustrate social studies assignments, but I did give him a space to practice and succeed at focusing his attention, a skill that he chose to carry with him and use in his third-grade classroom. (L. Izzard, personal communication, Jan., 1988)

### We are All the Same Because We are Different

I had to work at accepting the reality that many of my students were not ready to carry their “new stuff” out of the art room. In fact some were not even able or willing to grasp or hold onto it inside my room. While some students welcomed and moved eagerly into the open spaces of the Sketchwords classes, others challenged me to hold more tightly to the line that held them in touch with their limits. Christine Sleeter (1991) tells us

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that “we are all the same because we are different” (p. 11) . This is what makes education both exhilarating and exasperating. The diversity of our students moves across the surface of our teaching styles, pushing against the soft spots and squeezing through the cracks of our uncertainties. The students who rub against the grain of our classroom procedures are our wake-up calls. They keep us from dozing in the comfort of rote methods. They question our scripts and interrupt the mechanical recitation forcing us to pause and recover our original purpose. Huebner (1984) tells us that:

education is a call from the other that we may reach out beyond ourselves and enter into life with the life around us. . . . The difference and perhaps the tension between us is an opening into new possibilities for us. Differences are manifestations of otherness. (pp. 114-115)

Teachers must reach out beyond themselves and their lesson plans and allow the lives of their students to enter this space called education.

Our differences remind us that no one program can answer the needs of all our students. There is no one and only way, no absolute solution, no fail-safe generic formula. The art of teaching must constantly seek and maintain its balance, redistributing its weight like a teeter-totter on a playground of diverse teachers and learners who keep climbing on and off this institution of education.

### Not a Method But an Art

Tolstoi tells us that "...the best method would be ...not a method but an art" (cited in Pinar, 1988, p. 120) . The nature of this kind of art is rooted in the soil of living relationship. The word art comes from the Latin root *ar*, meaning to join. Teaching as a form of art works only when its structure and shape join in relationship with the content (teachers, students, materials). The form and the content must rejoin again and again as they accommodate and respond to the nature of the classroom.

It is interesting that as I speak of form and content, I also struggle with the form and content of this second chapter. I find it difficult to arrange and confine the threads of my thoughts onto the linear surface of these numbered pages. The word form must answer to both of its names, that of a noun and a verb , as it moves back and forth between its two roles of holding and shaping. The body of the form must stay in constant touch with its material, validating and nurturing that which it contains, allowing its content(s) to move within its parameters and being ever aware and responsive when it flows beyond the edges.

With this writing, I am learning that the content of both my dissertation and the classroom will need to move freely throughout the chapters of my thinking. The body of my thesis rests upon the notion of art as an intrinsic condition of faith in human nature and love for the life around us.

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It seems as I move further away from the walls of my elementary art classroom, where I worked for thirteen years, I come closer toward its center. The blend of art making with young children created a spiritual dimension for me as a teacher. It was this spiritual dimension that pulled me toward the margins of my classroom to get a better picture of what was going on in this magic space of art making. And in the fall of 1991 when I chose to move from elementary school to graduate school, I carefully packed the spirit of my young students within me.

As I move along the paths of my doctoral studies, I continue to unpack the lessons of these young teachers. I feel the presence of their voices woven into the pieces of my own fabric. They remind me to notice and feel the aesthetic dimension of art as it spreads itself over the surface of life, whether I'm in the grocery store selecting squash and bananas or sitting in my graduate classes noticing new patterns of meaning. As the voices of my students mingle with those of my graduate readings, they seem to waltz with one another inside my head and heart, always eager to welcome new partners. I will invite the voices of other teachers to join as we dance along the margins and within the text of this fabric called teaching. I want to redefine the meaning of teaching as I recover its aesthetic and spiritual dimensions.

In my research I use the multidimensional texture of art making with young children as a backdrop to explore its presence in other classrooms. I want to understand how it embraces and enhances the presence of otherness

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in the nature of teaching. The blend of the voices of both teachers and students will give my fabric the common but unique threads it needs to create a sense of order and meaning to the design of learning and aesthetic relationship in the classroom.

### A Calling or Summons to Possibility

I need to talk here about the contents of Raku bowls and Grand Inquisitors as they reveal themselves within the form of freedom and trust. Just before my family and I moved from Maine to North Carolina in 1982, I spent a week at Haystack Mountain School of Crafts learning to make Raku pottery. One of my favorite pieces is a large, open bowl (about 15" in diameter) that now sits on a side table in my dining room. The ragged softness of its edge reaches out to otherness whether holding pieces of fruit or quiet thoughts. The crackled glaze of its broad, concave surface resembles a large cupped palm of someone's hand holding hundreds of hairline cracks that seem to flow from a central source of energy.

This intricate, glazed surface did not come easily. I had to risk the life of my bowl, giving it up freely to the ritual of raku firing. I remember pulling its shiny, glowing hot, fragile form from the kiln with long handled tongs and dropping it precariously into a barrel of sawdust, seaweed, and leaves where it sizzled and smoldered overnight. Early the next morning I pulled out my blackened bowl, still warm from the firing, and began carefully washing away the soot. My bowl had survived all-of-a-piece, and as I

uncovered the beauty of its crackled glaze, I could feel the intensity of its life or death ordeal. This bowl held the trust that I was able to place in the strength of its form and content. I am reminded that I had to let go of it in order to help it reach the fullness of its inherent beauty. This piece of pottery needed more from me than just the promise of an average, safe existence.

My raku bowl also holds pieces of Dostoyevsky's story of the powerful meeting between Christ and The Grand Inquisitor in his novel, The Brothers Karamazov. The form and content of their encounter reveals the essence of trust, faith, and freedom, all of which are necessary for our completeness as human beings, all of which rely on reciprocity and love to complete their wholeness. The Grand Inquisitor stands like a barren, frozen landscape stretched across miles of fear, anger, and distrust before Christ and humanity. The content of his hollow, brittle frame shudders within the silent, gentle, open form of Christ. "The kiss (of Christ) glows in his heart, but the old man sticks to his idea" (Dostoyevsky, 1984, p. 308) .

The Grand Inquisitors of our educational institutions stand frozen in lifeless forms of control, adhering tightly to their ideas. We can feel the power of their grip in classrooms that fit passively into the tight spaces of absolutes and teacher-proof formulas. Students as well as teachers succumb to this rote and lifeless unquestioning routine when they relieve themselves of this human burden called free will, and insure methods to keep the bad content of human nature in check. The Grand Inquisitor inside me waits

patiently for those times in my life when I lose my trust and hope in the human spirit. I too, can lock myself and my students inside a rigid form that covers up the contents of our awe and wonder. I can lose touch with my trust, afraid to let go and give back the content of myself and my students to the life of our relationship. I must often pause and recall the origins of this word we call the classroom - a calling or summons to possibility.

The art of teaching makes room for the humanness of our nature. It accepts our fragility and has faith in the resiliency of our spirit. The heart of my thesis beats to the human rhythm of our slips and recoveries. It allows the inevitable, recurring bandwagon of new methods and fail-safe procedures to move through its classrooms because its beat is strong enough to keep the life of teachers and students alive regardless of the form and content of the classroom. Teachers who welcome and struggle through day-by-day relationships with the design of their classrooms are the faithful artists and lifelines of caring in our institutions.

### Drawing from Within

On the first day of Summer Session, 1994 at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro I met with my new students in my Child Art and Teaching class. I chose to quiet all of our anxious selves by reading from Martin Buber's (1966) book, The Way of Man:

Every man [sic] born into this world represents something new, something that never existed before, something original and unique. . . . It is the duty of every man. . . to know and

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consider that he is unique in the world. . . and that there has never been anyone like him in the world, for if there had been someone like him, there would have been no need for him to be in the world. . . . Every man's foremost task is the actualization of his unique, unprecedented and never-recurring potentialities, and not the repetition of something that another and be it even the greatest, has already achieved. (p. 16)

Art educator, Natalie Cole (1966) gives the same message but in her own unique words. "It is awesome and it is wonderful that from within each child can come something different" (p. 38) .

Over the next five weeks, as my elementary education students met and listened to their artist within, many of them awakened potentialities that had been sleeping silently since their early childhood. One student wrote in her journal, "It was almost as if we were kids again in elementary school, and that brought back lots of warm memories. After class I felt especially pleased with my work, but I'm not really sure why" (K. Borden, personal communication, June, 1994).

In our twenty-five meetings that summer I did not tell these students anything they didn't already know. I supplied meeting ground whose surface welcomed the spreading out of and listening to ourselves. M. C. Richards (1964) says:

We receive only what we already have! We become only what we already are! We can learn only what we already know! It is a matter of realizing potentialities. It is not a matter of adding to but of developing or evolving. We contain within ourselves a world of capacities, of possibilities. Perhaps this is why we learn most about ourselves through devotion to others. (p. 37)

Did my open passion for the blend of children and art making create safe ground for my student to “discover her original self” (London, 1989, p. 48)? Rod Taylor (1986) says that if “teacher[s] communicate [their] own fascination, [they] build upon students’ fascination and allow [their] students freedom to move from outside to inside” (p. 62). This same student of mine added in her journal, “it is really important to allow our students the freedom to answer their questions in their own voice. You can see how different people think and see the world through their art” (K. Borden, personal communication, June, 1994). This student was hearing and responding to the sound of that tiny whisper.

Throughout the semester my students continued to recover parts of themselves as they engaged freely with the art media and revealed personal truths that placed “the emphasis on the spirit rather than the semblance” (Cane, 1951, p. 130) of that within and around them. I encouraged them to enter into dialectic relationship with their media, welcoming the spaces where they could hear the rhythm of its voice within their own. In her own painting Joanna Field (1983) described an intimate meeting as that “which was both really there, but which also [was] something that I had given to it from my own memory and feeling” (p. 120). My students were returning again and again to themselves to draw fuller meaning into their experiences. Their personal voices were being heard and celebrated.

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I listen as a mother to another (student) mother telling me that she never thought of herself as an artist . . . until now.

When I was growing up, my brother who is two years older was thought of as being really smart and artistic. His drawings looked exactly like what they represented. Now that I reflect on the past, I suppose that I was conditioned to think that I was not artistic because I was not able to draw with precise accuracy as my brother. I developed the habit of saying that I can't draw. As the years have passed I more or less accepted the fact that I didn't have a talent for drawing and painting. Until now I had begun to believe that the part of my brain that controls spatial, holistic and pictorial forms was not as developed as my brother. This class has been an enlightening experience and has clarified some confusion regarding my artistic capabilities. I now realize that exact representations as perceived by others as "correct" may limit one's creativity such as myself. The heart of all created endeavors is expressed by its meaning. (V. Wilson, personal communication, June, 1994)

Vera's past lived experience in the shadows of her "artistic" brother was much like a piece of clay in the hands of a potter shaping and forming her present and future. When she reached the crossroads of the art class, she witnessed "a juncture of the new and the old" (Dewey, 1934, p. 60) in her thinking. She was able to recover and recreate her-self out from behind her brother's shadow. She was able to hear a voice that had been muffled inside her self-conscious tapes for many years.

I encouraged my students to heighten their senses. "Follow your roving eye. Listen for the strange voice. Notice the texture and color, the pattern of the art making process around you." Rollo May (1975) calls it "[creative] receptivity . . . the artist holding him- or herself alive and open to

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hear what being may speak" (p. 80) . In my classroom I work to create a living space that welcomes and nurtures this receptivity of aesthetic meetings.

### No Matter How Quietly We Stand

This past summer I had the opportunity to sit and write at a table made from a three-inch slice of the bottom of a white oak tree. This oak tree lived and grew for 227 years along the banks of Goose Creek, West Virginia. As I rested my elbows on its flat, broad surface that openly revealed its center and its life, I tried to imagine it as a tiny acorn in 1767. Its rippling rings told the experts about its first cutting in 1896, the drought of 1930, and the late frost of 1966. M. C. Richards (1964) tells us that "we are a real and radiating presence in the environment, no matter how quietly we may stand" (p. 110) .

As I stood among my art education students each day this summer I could sense the energy and tension that filled the spaces between us. It reminded me of M. C. Richards (1964) speaking as a potter. "The pot gives off something. It gives off its innerness, that which holds but which cannot be seen" (p. 20) . I image our classroom as a communal vessel. We hold and nurture the parts of ourselves that we are willing to bring to this space each day. "A painter does not approach a scene with an empty mind, but with a background of experiences" (Dewey, 1934, p. 87) . As the teacher, I prepare the ground work for our daily classroom meetings as I place parts of myself in the vessel each day. I initiate what London (1994) calls "aesthetic

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community - a pattern of interaction" (1994, p. ix) . And then I watch how my students begin to draw out and weave themselves within the openness of our "innerness" much like Rollo May's (1975) dialectic process:

World is interrelated with the person at every moment. A continual dialectic process goes on between world and self and self and world; one implies the other, and neither can be understood if we omit the other. This is why one can never localize creativity as a subjective phenomena. One can never study it simply in terms of what goes on within the person. The pole of the world is an inseparable part of the creativity of an individual. What occurs is always a *process*, a *doing* - specifically a process of interrelating the person and his or her world. (p. 50)

As a teacher and an artist I must reveal myself to my students. We grow from one another. "Any class may feel how it benefits by the presence of all individuals. Everyone has something to give the others" (Richards, 1986, p. 108) . My students and I must openly mingle our truths as we hold one another within our personal spaces. "He [sic] who gives himself to it may withhold nothing of himself" (Buber, 1958, p. 10) . My relationship with my students helps me witness the "big art of our lives" (Richards, 1986, p. 41) . I welcome the meeting ground of our lives where we take a "chunk of ourselves" (London, 1989, p. 61) , "breaking out of the solitariness and silence of one dimension . . . and making contact with the 'other'" (London, 1989, p. 74) .

Art making cannot confine itself to a private, solitary space. The process unfolds as I draw from within and become willing to spread the fabric

of myself like this three-inch slice of a 200-year-old oak tree or mingle my experiences with others within the sacred, communal vessels of our classrooms.

### The Voices are Always Here

During the summer of 1986, I chose to culminate my M.Ed. with a 12-week, studio exploration in sculptural weaving. I wanted time to reflect on and embrace my deep personal feelings about the spirituality of teaching art not to, but with my elementary students. I chose the medium of weaving because its process speaks so clearly of the movement of creative energy in the art room. I can sense an organic rhythm of the purely physical act of children making art. I can see the flow as they move their paint across the white paper. I can feel the tension as they push and pull on their lumps of clay to create an image. I can feel in touch with the orchestrated group rhythm as the children and I interact with one another. If any one of us pulls too tightly, all the rest of us feel the tug. We each have our own personal space, but at the same time, our spaces overlap, over and under one another, as new energy and forms emerge. The life-sized woven sculptural forms I created that summer portrayed the rhythm of learning and its dependency on the ever changing relationship between a teacher and her students, as we each take turns learning from one another. I knew instinctively that there were pieces of my knowing about the teacher-student relationship that I could only speak to with my sculptural forms. Isadora Duncan knows about our different

voices of awareness when she says, "If I could say it, I wouldn't have to dance it." (cited in Gardner, 1982, p. 90). The sculpting, the dancing, the painting, and drawing speak through us with their silent, strong voices as they softly beckon the words of our tacit knowing to the surface. The words and images move together creating a sense of order and meaning to the design of learning and being in relationship.

Over the past four years of my graduate work, the roots of my philosophy have continued to stretch toward new directions as I hear the voices of other educators in my studies. I am attracted to educators with whom I share a passionate search to understand and nurture the ways that children (and adults) make meaning in their lives. These are teachers who believe that we must listen to our children. These are teachers who have found ways to stretch the boundaries of their curriculums and cultivate our children's integrative natures. Their voices are always here. We need only to pause and listen.

It was in the first semester of my doctoral studies that I heard the sound of Sylvia Ashton-Warner (1963) speaking so passionately about her work with the Maori children of New Zealand in her book, Teacher. Her voice resonated within me as she spoke so honestly and humbly of her struggle to keep the creative vents of her classroom open.

*If only I had the confidence of being a good teacher. . . .  
I'm just a nitwit somehow let loose among children. If only  
I kept workbooks and made schemes and taught like other*

teachers I should have the confidence of numbers. It's the payment, the price of walking alone. If you saw the reading scheme I have been making the last few day you'd know why I speak of walking alone. Yet I must present it. I've got to do what I believe. And I believe in all I do. It's the price one continually pays for stepping out of line. (p. 198)

Teachers like Sylvia Ashton-Warner remind me why I'm doing what I'm doing as I work to make the meaning of my writing in this dissertation clear to you, the reader. Do you hear my message when I say that our classrooms house extraordinary resources? We as teachers must have the courage to wait long enough for the design of our classrooms to evolve and grow from within the hearts, minds, and hands of our fragile, yet resilient students.

That same semester, I heard more messages that validated the voices of our students from Eleanor Duckworth (1987) in her book, The Having of Wonderful Ideas. Her writing bears the marks of Jean Piaget who believes that everyone (teachers and students) construct their own knowledge, and that everyone (teachers and students) has the duty to listen to the meaning that others make. Duckworth (1987) values the "virtues of not knowing" (p. 64) and believes just as Ashton-Warner in that pause of trust that waits while students and teachers engage with one another within the heart of learning - "figuring it out. . . . Knowing the right answer requires no decisions, carries no risks, and makes no demands. It is automatic. It is thoughtless" (p. 64).

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And then I hear language arts teacher, Nancie Atwell (1991) turning this word “thoughtful” around in her head in the first chapter of her book, Side by Side, Essays on Teaching to Learn. Atwell wonders aloud about the rationale behind the kind of language our institutions use as she takes a glance at the term, critical thinking skills placed next to the word, thoughtfulness. Which one of these would I prefer to take into my classroom? Which one would dig deeper into my students’ thinking? Which one is more likely to place the teacher higher on the shelf as “the one who knows?” Atwell (1991) confesses, “I spent my first six years in the classroom looking for the someone else who would tell me what to do” (p. 4) . And now she looks to her students and listens as the sounds of their meaning making blend to create new levels of thoughtfulness in the classroom.

Every element of our classroom has a voice that speaks to the many parts of its design. Students and teachers are our textures, colors, shapes, and forms waiting to find their places in the aesthetic whole. Listen as they speak. Watch how they become the moving composition within the room - a human mobile that is always moving in response to its relationship with the whole. Hear all the different ways they “come to know,” as they make that which was not before.

### Listening is Love

Listening is love. ...Listening, like engagement with a text, effects a dissolution of the boundaries of self, as does love. Simultaneously frightening and exhilarating, it allows the "outside" "inside," opening up channels of possibility, sharing languages, inspiring action. (Edgerton, S. H., cited in Castenell & Pinar, 1993, p. 65)

In her book, Children's Arts from Deep Down Inside, Natalie Cole (1966) talks about her experiences of teaching art to a group of minority children at California Street School in Los Angeles in the 1960s. She made her classroom a safe place for her students to tell personal stories through their art making. One day she shares with her students a secret story that she had stored inside herself ever since a day in kindergarten when she felt the shame of being ashamed of her mother. She reaches in and draws out this embarrassing moment from "deep down inside" (p. 152) .

When I was in kindergarten my mother brought a great beautiful birthday cake. Because it was my birthday I envisioned for myself quite a generous piece of the cake. The teachers cut the cake into the tiniest slivers you ever saw and I got only one of those slivers. That wasn't what hurt. My mother was much older than other mothers and the teachers thought she was my *grandmother*. My mother was more interested in reading than she was in how she looked. Although dresses in those days came away down to the floor, my mother's ruffled black sateen petticoat trailed several inches beyond. In those days there were always two kindergarten teachers working together and I could see them giving each other long meaningful looks. I never have forgotten that unhappy day. I didn't want to feel ashamed of my mother but I did. (p. 153)



And then one student lovingly responded, "Mrs. Cole, you weren't the only one" (cited in Cole, 1966, p. 152) . Here lies the "stuff of art and life" (London, 1989, p. 37) - meeting-as-listening-as-communion. Within the space of my meetings can I reach out and shake with the hand of my own personal truth? Can I bare myself to share my whispers with loving listeners?

Here lies the soil of creative listening which requires me to move from isolated edges, cross restricted boundaries, and come to center with others and myself. In Quaker meetings of worship, the condition of centering creates "a feeling of flowing toward a common center" (Richards, 1973, p. 55).

A painting has a center of interest or a focal point, a common ground that beholds the meeting of the eye and the canvas. M. C. Richards (1973) tells me that the word, "focus," means warmth or hearth. Its root grows out of a "**sound** meaning to shine and to speak" (p. 131) . She describes the art of centering on her potters' wheel as "potter and clay press[ing] against each other. The firm tender, sensitive pressure which yields as much as it asserts. It is like a handclasp between two living hands, receiving the greeting at the very moment that they give it" (1964, p. 9) . Here artist and media listen and respond to one another. They receive one another. Here lies the ground for listening as aesthetic meeting-with-self and the meeting-with-others.

All Real Life is Meeting

When I met and began teaching 900 elementary children in 1980, I received the rich and freely given gifts of the creative spirits that came from within these young, energetic bodies. And the following summer, when I created pottery, my art making became a flow of their energies within me. My clay pieces were an aesthetic blend of the spirit of the clay and my enriched experience of self-in-relation to all these little people. My Raku pots delicately held the dialectic relationship we shared. I could hear the voices of my students mingling within the nurturing walls of my bowls.

In this paper I cannot speak solely of my artist-within without brushing up against the otherness in my life. I cannot speak solely of art making without running into and through all the other dimensions of my life. My invisible voice touches those who stand ready to listen. My art making, my imagery, my-self-within bears the markings of my meetings with others. I must be willing to reach in and draw out my-self from "deep down inside" and wait for the voice of another to respond, "You weren't the only one" (Cole, 1966, p. 152) .

I listened when the tiny whispering sound called me out of the complacent familiarity of my art room. I went and stood at the entrance of my door where the space felt "simultaneously frightening and exhilarating." I hear M. C. Richards (1964) reminding me that "we must be steady enough in ourselves to be open and to let the winds of life blow through us" (p. 97) .

She also tells me that the word “education ...comes from two words in Latin meaning out and to draw or to lead” (p. 12) . The tiny whispering sound draws me and others out into a clearing. M. C. Richards helps us pull aesthetics and education out of the narrow spaces of the classrooms and shake it out onto this open, common ground of our gathering.

Chapter II asks me to pause and listen for the call that pulls me from the mundane specialization of my classroom. I hear a recovered vision of the classroom - a calling toward an opening, an opportunity for another space that nurtures the art of relationship. I move with other teachers onto the soil of common ground where we teach so much more than just math or science, reading or art. Chapter II provides the grounding for Chapter III where we as teachers will gather together to hear our spiritual selves.

### CHAPTER III

#### THE GATHERING

Chapter III moves into the “clearing” where teachers from different disciplines are called to gather not as specialists standing in their separate fields of study but as artists who stretch themselves and their students across unexplored landscapes of learning. When I look up the word, artist, my Webster’s New Universal Unabridged Dictionary (1979) places it on the upper rungs of a clinical, one-dimensional hierarchy, defining it as: “one who does anything very well, with a feeling for form and effect.” This generic definition says nothing of the spiritual and moral dimensions that the artist-as-teacher opens up to the hearts, minds, and hands of the members of the classroom community. In this chapter I want to portray the character of artist in the light of care and love as I work to recover the moral and spiritual fullness of its meaning.

#### The Conscious Adjustment of the New and Old

I pause to think about the presence of the innate, infinite possibility in this word, recovery and how often the verb, recover, touches the fabric of my life. It is wound up in my philosophy as teacher, artist, student, mother, wife, woman. John Dewey (1934) reminds me that the nature of the recovery process flows throughout the creative experience when he defines

imagination as “the conscious adjustment of the new and the old” (p. 272) . The kind of artists I speak of use recovery as a source of reaffirmation of themselves as integral pieces that fit aesthetically into the wholeness of caring and loving relationships.

This concept of recovery has crossed my path many times along my professional and personal journey often revealing itself outside the context of my schooling. One of its threads leads me back to the summer of 1969. When my husband and I were married, we bought used living room furniture at Goodwill, and I spent the first month of our marriage recovering a couch and two arm chairs. I removed the faded, worn upholstery and used it as a pattern to re-cover the life that I felt was present in these seemingly tired pieces of family furniture. And this same thread runs through the art of teaching. I know that a spirit of nurture and support lives within the frame of all our classrooms. I can feel the human energy that lies hidden underneath the tired and worn dictionary descriptions of education as an institution.

In my Art 367, Child Art and Teaching Class, where I introduce the powers of art making to future elementary teachers, I witness my undergraduate and graduate students recovering their “lost artists.” One student exclaimed in her journal after her first experience with tempera painting: “I had forgotten what it felt like to be able to draw absolutely anything I wanted to! . . . I really feel myself growing as an artist. . . .”

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After Jamie saw my painting today, she said that I was very artistic. I was really touched" (J. Champion, personal communication, Oct., 1993) .

Another of my students writes about her favorite class experience at the end of the 1994 summer session: "This self portrait [project] has really helped me realize who I am. I have also realized that I like the artist in me and that I need to bring that part of me out more often! I am glad that I was able to share myself as a person and an artist with you!" (S. Brenner, personal communication, June, 1994)

### Calling Forth Artist-as-Joiner

As an art teacher I want to reveal the spiritual nature that lives within the etymological meaning of this name, artist, digging below the surface to its Latin root, "*ars*" to call forth artist-as-joiner. This kind of artist rejoins the severed circuits of human energies enabling the returning flow to re-form what really matters not only in our schools but in many other places of our lives.

As I write this dissertation, I must follow my thoughts when they stray beyond the confines of the classroom. The artist within us does not go off duty after school hours. All of our experiences are our classrooms of learning. The artist in us lives and breathes in all the places of our lives whenever we awaken and recover that sacred part of ourselves.

One such place was my first-hand experience with a major tropical storm. In the pre-dawn hours of a September morning in 1989 Hurricane

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Hugo devastated our city. The electrical power went out at 2:30 a.m. in Charlotte, North Carolina and did not return to our neighborhood for thirteen days. By sunrise the morning of the storm, the power of human energy had already begun to flow throughout the streets of our community as neighbors joined together and created a living circuitry of human compassion and care. I watched our sixteen-year-old son, Josh work side-by-side active and retired lawyers and business executives hand-sawing a narrow path through a fallen group of fifty-year-old mammoth pin-oak trees that had lined our street before the storm. Those of us with gas stoves in our kitchens provided coffee and hot chocolate for the electrically dependent households. We comforted the family who lived three houses to our left. Their home had been split in half by one stricken evergreen. We gathered and joined ourselves back together after many of the taken-for-granted pieces of our lives were torn and scattered by the great winds of this storm.

There was, however, the ever present, pervasive counter flow of negative energy - the shadow side of artist - one who skillfully uses the design of any circumstance to climb higher up the ladder of greed and power. These clever people are often called "con-artists." Some were the merchants who doubled and tripled the price of the coveted ordinary supplies like ice, candles, flashlights, and batteries. One was the contractor who abandoned our neighbor's broken home as soon as he received pre-payment for supplies. This potential for human nature to swing back and forth between honesty

and dishonesty, good and evil, compassion and indifference, generosity and greed, love and hate is why I must take time in this writing to clearly define the kind of artist and the nature of the aesthetic, spiritual space where I propose we gather in all the different classrooms of our lives.

I am focusing on the dimension of the artist who uses the design of our lives as resources and materials to join one another in meaningful relationships of care and love. The power of the hurricane offered our community the opportunity for a pause to awaken our nurture and care in place of our hurried indifference and taken-for granted attitudes. The power outage gave us time to recover many of our lost, forgotten, or neglected spaces of just being with and for one another. We reclaimed a far more powerful and compassionate source of energy - that of our human hearts.

Our first day back in school I asked my students to talk and draw about their individual experiences during and after the storm. We filled the room with eye witness accounts of the vastness of one's powerlessness alone and the awesomeness of everyone's power together. The stories we shared joined us with the common bond of our extraordinary experiences. Our conversations and drawings pulled the threads of our individual and shared experiences out into the open where we could begin to claim our likenesses and differences. We were using and joining ourselves as our greatest learning resources within this kind of aesthetic, spiritual relationship.

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It is in these open spaces of student conversation and sharing where teachers-as-artists, like dedicated seamstresses, can begin to piece together the remnants of their classroom, lovingly hand-stitching the adjoining pieces, recovering and co-creating with their students an emergent wholeness of new and used energies.

### Being There for One Another

I want to focus on the way that we gather in the classrooms of our learning and help us become aware of the working design of students and teachers within all common spaces, regardless of what or where we teach. In this middle space, this open ground of meeting, teachers and students themselves become the clearing, the channel through whom the language of being-in-relation speaks. Heidegger tells us that we are “not the enforcer, the opener of truth, but the ‘opening for it,’ the clearing” in which it will make itself manifest” (cited in Steiner, 1979, p. 115) .

In my search I need to take a closer look at the spiritual design of our classrooms. M. C. Richards links the concept of design, with the German concept, *dasein*, a condition of presentness that Heidegger uses throughout his writings. “Design: What does that word mean? DA-SEIN. To be there, to be there” (Richards, 1973, p. 22) . Heidegger emphasizes that the word, “*there* is the world: the concrete, literal actual, daily world. To be human is to be immersed, implanted, rooted in the earth, in the quotidian matter-of-factness of the world (‘human’ has in it *humus*, the Latin for ‘earth’)” (cited in

Steiner, 1979, p. 83) . Regardless of the media, regardless of the subject, we the teachers and our students need to be there for one another when we bring ourselves to gather in the sacred spaces of our (extra)ordinary classrooms.

“Sein, the verbal noun for ‘being is a process, an activity” a being-there” (Heidegger, cited in Steiner, 1979, p. 46) . Spiritual design is aesthetic relationship that holds and nurtures the ebb and flow of the making of dialectical pattern. It is the grounding for Martin Buber’s *I-Thou* relationship. Heidegger helps me make some sense of the paradox of this phenomena, presentness and being there. “We are not ourselves. Everyone is the other and no one is himself [sic]. Being that is ...subsides to a oneness, ...a theyness” (cited in Steiner, 1979, p. 92) . Here lies a clearing, an opportunity for the verb of authentic art making where teacher-as-artist is there “. . . to pierce the core of things. . . . The artist is the source of the work. The work is the source of the artist. Neither is without the other. Both are the product of ‘the truth of being”” (cited in Steiner, p. 132) . The art of teaching is being there to not be there. My greatest insights emerge as a result of losing myself to the process. Being there is losing consciousness of beginnings and endings. When I am truly there, I lose my name; I lose my concrete self to the experience. Maybe this is the connection Richards made to the concept of *dasein*. To be there is moving from the outside to the inside. I forget that I am a spectator and become one with the design of the experience.

“To inquire into being is not to ask what is this or that? It is to ask: What is is” (Heidegger, cited in Steiner, 1979, p. 153) ? My kindergarten children taught me that “Art is not an imitation of the real. It is more real” (Heidegger, cited in Steiner, 1979, p. 136) . Their art and the aesthetic design of our relationship made something that was more than real because my life-filled young students left nothing of themselves behind when they came to our weekly art gatherings. Their energy and joy drew me into this space of dialectical relationship to reveal a spiritual form of art making - the aesthetic design of teachers and students in loving relationship. I do not see art making as just a group of completed paintings, drawings, or sculptures. It can be an ongoing experience, like a dance or a drama, where all members take active parts and move in time with the beat of human relationship. In this kind of setting art making becomes personal and passionate conversations between teachers, students, and the materials of their experience.

Aristotle helps me grasp a more common understanding of the aesthetic nature of the teacher-student relationship. Aristotle’s definition of aesthetics modified Plato’s theory so that art represented not an imitation of the actual but the possible. He believed that “beauty depends on organic unity, a unity in which every part contributes to the quality of the whole,” (Reese, 1993, p. 5) and that aesthetics is more of a condition of harmony rather than a static, elite, beautiful “thing.” I call on all teachers to help me pull this meaning of aesthetics down from the hard to reach shelves and

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remember that it lies within everyone's reach. Aesthetics has been sequestered for too long within the select and isolated connoisseur spaces of museums and concert halls. It needs to be let loose to move freely within the foundations and across the landscapes of our everyday meetings. I am alive to aesthetic experiences whenever I am in touch with the design of my relationship with the liveness around me. I am able to bring aesthetics to life whenever I spread my truth out onto the common ground of otherness. Greene (1978) tells us that "an aesthetic experience requires a direct encounter" and that it is at "this kind of gathering that people can become present to themselves" (pp. 192, 84) . Both the aesthetic and the spiritual composition of these meetings is rooted in the everydayness of our lives and reflects the measure of how much of ourselves we bring with us to the canvas of our classrooms each day. The classroom-as-composition can become Buber's sacred meeting ground where all the elements of the learning experience come together to make a picture of community.

### Classroom as a Sacred Canvas

The classroom-as-a-painting pictures so much more than the images on its surface. Heidegger speaks of the wonder of a painting by Van Gogh:

A pair of rough peasant shoes. Nothing else. Actually the painting represents nothing. But as to what *is* in that picture? What is here? The canvas? The brushstrokes? The spots of color? All these things we name are there. But the existential presentness of the painting, the part that reaches into our being cannot be adequately defined. We feel, we know, that there is something else there, something utterly decisive. When we

seek to articulate it, it is always as though we were reaching into a void. (cited in Steiner, 1979, p. 42)

This void that Heidegger speaks of is filled with expectancy. Its ineffable nature can be felt but not touched, heard but not spoken in words, whole but never complete. It stands ready to welcome our truths. The openness of its form holds promises of infinite possibilities and “not yet’s.” Like Richards’ (1964) pot, it “gives off its innerness” ( p. 20) . Like the quiet whisper, it calls to us in the midst of the pregnant pause. Like Grumet’s line across the page, it beckons us to “follow . . . without knowing where it leads” (cited in Pinar, 1988, p. 458) . Like the Raku firing ritual, it asks me to let go of my pot to experience the possibility of the fullness of life. When we bring and hold loving, trusting relationship into the expectant voids of our lives, we let go of ourselves, making room to receive the fullness and joy of life much like the wonderful legend in Jewish Hasidism:

When God poured out his grace, man could not stand firm before the fullness, and the vessels broke and sparks fell out of them into all things. And shells formed around them. By our hallowing, we help free the sparks. They lie everywhere - in our tools, food, clothes - a kind of radiance, emanation, a freedom, something that fills our hearts with joy and gratitude. There is something within man [sic] that seeks joy. (cited in Richards, 1964, p. 12)

I am using the phenomena of art making to speak of and recover my portrait of the classroom as a sacred canvas. Without the elements of human nurture, this room can become a standardized assembly line of lifeless

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products. When I paint in my life drawing class, the paint, the brushes, the canvas, and the subject (really) matter to each other, as we join together to create an image that has not yet been. Every material has its own voice. Charcoal speaks of the subject in a different way than pencil, ink, or paint. Newsprint, drawing papers, and canvas respond differently, depending on the drawing and painting tools or the touch of human hands. I must give myself to my media and my subject in order to hear and to answer. I am only one part of this creative process. The fullness of the image will reveal itself as I work in loving relationship with all the other parts of this whole art making experience. Knowing the outcome is as deadly as it sounds. The something within us that seeks joy atrophies in many of the predictable, regimented settings of our classrooms.

The kind of classroom that I speak of as sacred canvas welcomes our hallowing. When we bring ourselves to this kind of gathering we enter a space, an opening, a void that beholds a covenant between those of us ready to stretch beyond the edges of our knowing. Heidegger says that “man [sic] is to the extent that he stands open to being in what Wordsworth would have called a wise passiveness” (cited in Steiner, 1979, p. 129) .

I want to draw out the threads of aesthetics and spirituality as I weave them over and under the fabric of the classroom. These threads “can be as limber as breath . . . [or] as tough as a wild grape vine . . . (Richards, 1964, p. 6) as they run through and support the living and working design of the

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classroom. Spirituality is the energy that breathes life into the conversation of our aesthetic spaces.

I define the meaning of what I call aesthetic spirituality as a condition of being-in-relation. "No one knows alone" (Grumet, 1993, p. 207). Martin Buber (1958) reminds us that "all real life is meeting" ( p. 11) . Matthew Fox (1991) tells us "the spirit is life, *ruah*, breath, wind. To be spiritual is to be alive, filled with *ruah*, breathing deeply, in touch with the wind" (p. 11) . He speaks of taking a spiritual and mystical journey where "the path is *the way itself*" (p. 12) , and Buber (1966) says that every "man [sic] must find his own way" ( p. 18) . It is in the design of this perceptual middle space of beholder and beheld that the beauty of communion breathes. Here lies the soil of art making and the aesthetic spirituality in all areas of our lives.

### They Can Begin

"Where two or three are gathered together, they can begin" (Richards, 1973, p. 146). It's interesting that I, too, have been drawn to this message spoken to us through the Gospel of Matthew:

"For where two or three are gathered together in my name,  
there am I in the midst of them." (Mt. 18: 19-20)

In the summer of 1986 I worked every day in my art studio at UNC-G creating large sculptural basket-like weavings and listening for the quiet sounds of my emergent truths about the art of teaching. One truth I hoped to explore was the rich, organic multi-relationships that lived and

moved within the space of art making with elementary children. The natural form and rhythm of the weaving helped me get in touch with the essence of this relationship that I could not describe with words or images.

One particular tree that captured my attention that summer was the crepe myrtle. I discovered and adopted several of these graceful, stately trees on my early evening bicycle rides along the side streets and park paths of Greensboro. The grouped clusters of their smooth, beige trunks and magenta foliage spoke to me about the interdependence of oneness and wholeness. The crepe myrtle was *there* in its organic design of random trunks, all growing from a common source, each one stretching upward from the soil, and each one co-creating sacred spaces and energy only through its relationship with its brothers and sisters. I spent the summer collecting tree branches and assorted fibers and using them to weave human-like vessel sculptures. These open forms helped me recover and speak of the aesthetic and spiritual design of relationship that I sensed and held gently, teaching in the company of young children. Since 1980 when I had returned to the classroom as an elementary art teacher, my students had been teaching me about the design of spiritual community which I hoped to understand and language more fully as I worked with my sculptural forms.

Six years earlier I had begun this very special journey in the company of young, eager children inside the elementary schools of four small towns in southwestern Maine. By the end of the first week in September I had met



almost all of my 900 young students with whom I would be sharing the magic of art making for the 1980-81 school year. By the end of that first month I knew instinctively that our weekly meetings held some kind of extraordinary energy. My art cart was carrying much more than paint, paper, scissors, and glue to these twenty-seven classrooms. Even the crowded spaces of my tightly stacked blocks of “art times” seemed always to find room for our hallowing, as we set free the sparks of ourselves in these makeshift conditions of art making. Thourghout the school year I received the rich and freely given gifts of the creative spirits that come with these young, energetic bodies. And the following summer, when I created pottery, my own art making became a flow of their energies within me. My clay pieces were an aesthetic blend of the spirit of the clay and my enriched experience of myself in relation to all those little people.

What was it about this spiritual blend of children and art making? How did these two elements come together and make so much more than the sum of their parts? It reminds me of when I blend and knead my bread making ingredients together and return a couple hours later to find a bowl that is overflowing with the internal energy of its own transformed self. Flour, sugar, salt, honey, raisins, yeast, milk, and eggs - such simple, everyday goods that sit quietly on the shelves, packaged and self contained until I break each one open and join all of them together to create an ancient but new form of human nourishment called bread.

This spiritual blend of art making and children held an abundance of personal goods that the students brought freely to the experience. The children were coming together to join and celebrate themselves as artists in a spiritual community of co-creation. No one makes art alone. We always have others with us even if only in our minds and hearts. Unlike older students and adults, my young students had little difficulty remembering and recovering themselves as divine creators made in the image of God.

Matthew Fox (1979) reminds us that:

When the Creator made us, God “breathed a portion of His [sic] breath into us. Each of us has a share in that breath. Each of us is a ‘portion of the divine from on high.’ Every soul is joined to every other soul by its origin in the Creator of all souls” It is the “truth of truths,” . . . that every man [sic] is our brother, that we are all children of one Father, all sheep of one Shepherd, all creations of one Creator, all parts of one infinite, gracious spirit that pervades and sustains all of mankind. (Rabbi Dressner, cited in Fox, p. 30)

When we came together each week for art in those twenty-seven different classrooms, a flow and overflow of joy and awe, like the yeasted dough, awakened and moved throughout the spaces as my students seemed to breathe life and energy into their art creations just as God, our Supreme Creator, breathed life into all creatures of our universe.

### To Teach is to Create a Space

This space that Palmer (1983) speaks of is not a specific, physical place but a form of energy, a process of recovering truths in the communities of our

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classrooms. It is the making of a sacred meeting ground where we come home to (welcome) our real selves. Reality is no longer some thing "out there." It is "in here" in this living space between us. The artist within me awakens and stretches in the flow of this dynamic energy force. As I hold and untangle the threads of otherness around me, I find more of myself unravelling into the light. Huebner (1984) encourages me to welcome that which is not what I seem to be. He interprets Whitehead's concept of education as my duty to be with others in the flow of this sacred space:

... education as a duty, ... is a response to, indeed a response-ability for, the earth - the flora and the fauna - and those of us - neighbors and strangers, friends and foes - who people it. Thus education is a call from the other that we may reach out beyond ourselves and enter into life with the life around us. (p. 114)

I want to change the noun, life, to the verb, living. Living is the space. And the space is living. Like a spiral force, the threads in this living space move over and under one another, strengthening and enriching their inseparable fibers. In this kind of sacred learning space, it is difficult to isolate or hierarchically rank teacher, student, material, setting, and subject because everything and everyone is a vital and necessary matter.

The artist in us helps us feel the magnificence of all forms of life and living, accepting their bigness, smallness, or strangeness and making room for the flow of diverse energies in the spacings of our lives. All the creatures of the earth are related and dependent on one another. It seems that the

human race is the only species that has a need to separate the inhabitants of our planet, constructing oppressive and elite hierarchial ladders. The tall, restrictive spaces that human beings create keep us from seeing and re-membering that we are all kin folk. I was touched by the word, kin, when I read The Education of Little Tree (1976). Shortly after reading this book, however, I was jolted back to the reality and irony of our human nature. The media spotlighted the shadow side of Forest Carter, the author of this book, with accusations that questioned the truth of his “true story” and linked him and profits from his book to the Klu Klux Klan (I have trouble even having this name in my dissertation). The news release shook my faith and belief in the goodness of human nature. Can I still accept and value this heart warming story that tells of the wisdom and innocence of a young Native American boy being raised by his grandparents. The paradox of this loving story and the ethical questions raised about its author offer living testimony that human nature can be aesthetically good or evil, generous or greedy, loving or hateful. I recall my husband’s often repeated quote by Abraham Joshua Heschel (1965): “Man [sic] is always faced with the choice of listening to God or to the snake” (p. 102). My disappointment with Carter is surrounded by my benefit-of-the-doubt willingness to allow the best side of his human nature to live through his story. Little Tree’s grandparents remind us that we are all “kin,” as they teach him about the relationship that ties love and understanding together in a soft but firm embrace.

Granma would say, "Do ye kin me, Wales?" and he would answer, "I kin ye," it meant, "I understand ye." To them, love and understanding was the same thing. Granma said you couldn't love something you didn't understand; nor could you love people, nor God, if you didn't understand the people and God. . . . Granma said the understanding run deeper as the years went by, and she reckined it would get beyond anything mortal folks could think upon or explain. And so they called it "kin." Granpa said back before his time "kinfolks" meant any folks that you understood and had an understanding with, so it meant "loved folks." But people got selfish, and brought it down to mean just blood relatives, but that actually it was never meant to mean that. (Carter, 1976, p. 38)

Relatives, relationships, kinships - these are our loving connectors that move through and strengthen the spaces of caring and nurturing classrooms (and beyond). These living clusters of energy are natural forms of energy. If I purposely block or interrupt their flow I upset the organic balance of our Creator's art making. The finiteness and arrogance of my human nature often prevent me from comprehending the vastness of the ripples that can flow from just one small, natural or contrived action. The Hebraic interpretation of the origin and nature of imagination speaks of both the possibility and the magnitude of our actions:

. . . man [sic] is ultimately responsible for the kind of relationship which exists between the lower and the higher worlds. Although we may consider our actions and imaginings to be of little consequence, they do in fact affect the whole creation process from beginning to end. For just as Yahweh created man in his own image by breathing the spirit into his body, so too, the Zohar tells us, 'each breath of man's mouth has its importance . . . . No word or sound uttered by man is vain: there is a place for each of them.' (Kearney, 1988, p. 69)

As an artist I bring my receptivity to the space of the painting experience. The nature of this space is like a sacred habitat or ecosystem that is dependent on a respectful relationship between all of its inhabitants, no matter how great or how small. My aesthetic nature reminds me not to fill and suffocate the space with unnecessary nervous energy. I must learn to pause and listen for the rhythm of a natural balance between all the parts of this aesthetic design. The painting will reflect my intouchness with the materials, subject and environment of this experience. It will let me “show and tell” how much of me I was able to let go and lose myself to the process. It will reveal the level of my trust in the otherness of the experience.

About fifteen years ago I experimented with a reversal method of drawing and painting. Instead of laying my paints on the white, primed surface, I began with a large piece of canvas that I had covered with a dark, burnt-sienna wash. With the surface still wet, I used q-tips and cotton scraps to gently lift varying amounts of dark pigment from the surface, one stroke at a time. As the evening progressed, a soft image of a family of onions began to emerge from the darkness. The forms of the onions moved forward and backward, coming to life within a myriad of burnt-sienna shades and tints. I felt as if I had been a part of a sacred conversation. This painting hangs in my dining room, and each time I look at it, I have to remind myself that I really did take part in the birth of this piece. I did not do it by myself, nor was I even

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the primary source. I was just a loving participant in the giving and receiving and the coming together of many parts into one unified whole.

This is the kind of spiritual and aesthetic condition that I hope to recover in the spaces of our classrooms. I am looking for an energy that lives and grows between the students and their teacher as they work together to recover a relationship grounded in the material of the class. Authentic encounters and experiences can only happen within an aesthetic, loving community. This is why young students often create spiritual spaces when they gather to make art. They know how to lose themselves to the joy of the process. They know how to turn over exclusive ownership and need for control to the life of the art making experience. They welcome opportunities to see everything anew. Heschel (1962) reminds us that “he who thinks that we can see the same object twice has never seen” (p. xii) .

The classroom becomes a threshold that leads us to well traveled but virgin territories. The idea of threshold takes me back to our old farmhouse in Bridgton, Maine where my family lived from 1972-1982. The threshold leading from our living room to our country kitchen was a step-up that was covered by an aged fifteen inch wide pumpkin pine board. This was no ordinary board. Its concave, worn surface bore the footsteps of so many different family members coming to and going from the kitchen hearth since 1790. Every once in a while when I crossed this threshold, I could feel the touch of so many others who had journeyed before me. This common pine

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board had been and continued to be shaped by the human footsteps of family and friends moving through their lives. It held and connected the nature of our different but same journeys. We walk in others' footsteps; we repeat our own footsteps over and over again, but each time is always a new, never before time in our lives.

### There am I in the Midst of Them

Our coming together opens spaces for creation. The possibilities for emergent creativity is limited only by each member's willingness to be a loving co-creator in the design of the community. In 1969 Richards (1973) met with a group of educators to experiment with the making of a "non-media-oriented conference, 'where [as she put it] we would focus on the resources within ourselves. . . . Mary Nyburg, chairperson of the conference put the question this way: 'How can we use more of ourselves as design resource'" (p. 123) ? All teachers need to be asking this question every time they enter the composition of their classrooms. The more we use pure pieces of ourselves in the design of our learning, the richer the substance of our gatherings. Richards (1973) thinks about the meaning of the words, pure and perfect:

"What means pure? . . . Pure, pure . . . PURE APPLE JUICE!  
I began to sense a clue. Pure apple juice is made from the whole  
apple, bruises, blemishes, skin, core, the whole imperfect works.  
Pure apple juice is not pasteurized, refined, filtered, nonentity!  
Bruises blemishes worms and all. To be perfect is to be whole,  
a paradox, even as our Father in Heaven. (p. 200)



I believe that we are talking here about co-creation and the aesthetic, spiritual design of a classroom that works to draw out the real and diverse nature of its members. When two or more come together we can begin co-creating loving community portraits. Within the frame of this aesthetic canvas, we must remind ourselves that teaching is a living form of art and that “an artist is not a special kind of person, but [that] every person is a special kind of artist” (Richards, 1973, p. 92) .

Families and groups of people who work together often pause and join with one another at the end of their gatherings to capture each one of themselves together in a group snapshot. The portrait records a myriad of faces with each one representing one complex, unique self in relation to the whole. Just as no two group portraits can ever be the same, no two spaces that hold gatherings of living human resources can ever match one another. Have you ever tried to capture a perfect family portrait? With each shot, the personality in some one of us always manages to say, “Yes, but I’m still a one-and-only part of this whole family.” My presence touches and changes the shape of every composition I enter, depending on how much or how little of myself I give to the design. The composition of every classroom is balanced by the measure and weight of each one’s commitment in relation to all the other pieces. Each member must ask, “how much of myself am I willing to give to this picture?”

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As we meet on the canvas of our gatherings, we can never predetermine the shape of the portraits we co-create. Our pictures come in all shapes, sizes, textures, and colors. The movement and rhythm of the spaces follow the paths of the members as each of us move through the threshold “in any direction and feel the form’s flow” (Richards, 1973, p. 245) . Our crossings help us connect and support one another even though we may be on separate journeys. Richards (1973) knows that “in order to go straight, we have to go in more than one direction” (p. 127) . Her professional path led her away from the halls of formal academia. She left her professorship at the University of Chicago in 1945 to seek alternate, non-traditional crossing points of aesthetics and education. “The way to the center is abandonment. . . . Am I willing to give up what I have in order to be what I am not yet” (1973, p. 141)? Richards helps me grasp the power of trust in self and in others. She loosens my tight grip on inside, safe certainties so that I can move out from the center to see more of the whole picture. It is here on the edge of otherness that I can give more of myself to the wholeness of the community.

This last year of my doctoral program I am teaching an undergraduate course called The Institution of Education. One of the written assignments is an autobiographical narrative. I ask my students to write about and share an experience in their lives that helped form their view of the world or influenced and shaped them as adults. Just before Thanksgiving break I read a

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piece of my life to my students. They really listened. I could feel the receptivity in the room. What is it about truth that connects, that draws and holds our attention so fully? I was honest. I was sharing part of me. I was giving something of myself freely to my students. I experienced a powerful space where the giving is the receiving. It is in this awesome space of “two or more gathered together” that we can feel the touch of Jesus’ promise: “there am I in the midst of them” (Mt. 18: 19) . It is at this kind of aesthetic, spiritual gathering where we can re-live the New Testament story of the loaves and fishes and experience a loving space that welcomes and accommodates an infinite supply of reciprocity and nourishment.

#### Creativity as Compassion

I cannot move on in my writing without holding Matthew Fox’s carefully woven fibers of “creativity as compassion” (1979) up to the light of this chapter. Fox contemplates that “perhaps compassion and creativity are in fact the same energy. For both seem to operate at the deep level of interconnections! Compassion is seeing, recognizing, tasting the interconnections; creativity is about *making the connections*” (1979, p. 127) . The words of Fox are like a rich assortment of different puzzle pieces that reveal glimpses of my tacit understanding of the art of teaching. The individual pieces need my human touch to interlock with one another and make a whole picture as I find their fit in the different spaces of this chapter.

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When Fox (1979) ties compassion to the “feeling of kinship with all fellow creatures” (p. 4), I think of Little Tree’s lesson on love and understanding from his grandparents. When Fox (1979) uncovers the etymological root of compassion - “*cumpatior*” - meaning “to suffer with; to share solidarity with” (p. 3), I remember Heidegger’s and Richards’ understanding of design - “Dasein” - the condition of seeking and being there for and with the otherness in the sacred spaces of our living. Fox (1979) reminds us that compassion is a verb that actively loves rather than a noun that passively pities in our relationship with others. It is a integral way of life, an attitude of hope and faith coming from within rather than from without in the form of an exterior, generic label. It is something “real and active, [not] just words or mere talk” (p. 7) . Fox (1979) tells us that “God’s compassion points the way to humanity’s compassion as a spirituality which becomes the art of walking in God’s way” (p. 27) .

Fox carefully braids the threads of compassion and creativity together for us so that we can hold tightly and take the leap away from the predetermined certainties in our lives. “The creative person, then, depends wholeheartedly on living in order to break through this fear of life” (Fox, 1979, p. 119) . I want to pause and take a closer look at these two words: “in order.” The artist and the teacher-as-artist both must maintain a sense of order in this creative process of learning. “The artist . . . gives form, order, style, interpretation and arrangement to the matter” (Fox, 1979, p. 127) .

But this order is not mandated in a traditional, mechanical way. "Often images come in the process of working. The material, his hands - together they beget" (Fox, 1979, p. 127) . The artist allows the divine plan, the design of the classroom to happen in its own order. This order evolves from the energy of creativity and compassion and creates an organic structure in which all members of this aesthetic, spiritual community are given the space they need for their own freedom. Some students, some materials, and some subjects need more space or a different kind of dimension than others. "The 'product' of creativity is energy" (Fox, 1979, p. 126) - a living community of energy that frees the sparks of our God-given fullness and joy.

Creative energy moves freely in the classroom, making room for Parker Palmer's (1993) three essential dimensions of a learning space: openness, boundaries, and hospitality (p. 73) . Teachers-as-artists must resist their fearful instinct to overfill the learning space with the nervous energy of pat answers and solutions - the negative diversions. I struggle with this as a painter and a sculptor and as a writer. Classrooms are like framed pictures. They hold the community together while still giving open space for its members to struggle for interpersonal truths within the firmness of its boundaries. As a teacher I cannot fix or solve my students' problems, but I can love them and hold them steady as they piece together the joyful and the painful parts of their puzzles.

Fox (1979) helps me make the connection between classroom and art studio here: "Where does the creator or artist enter into this equation? The materials appear already given, whether clay for the potter, pigments for the painter, bodies for the dancer, ideas for the writer. But not entirely. For the creator must select which materials to employ and which to leave unused" (p. 127) . The techniques, the subject matter, the materials, whether in the studio or classroom, are my boundaries that allow me the joyful but fearful freedom to follow my own truth.

Each new class for a teacher-as-artist is like a fresh piece of canvas being stretched out to life. The first class meetings of every semester are filled with the primordial energy of newness and a sense of fragility - the coming together of two or more on this clean, white surface. What kinds of movement, rhythm, and balance will be set in motion by this particular combination of colors, textures, and shapes? The class meetings become like pot luck suppers where each member brings something of him or herself to share with the rest of the community. Teachers-as-artists are the hosts who welcome and receive their guests, hoping everyone will quickly feel at home in this new learning space. Classrooms-as-studios "need to be hospitable not to make learning painless but to make painful things possible, things without which no learning can occur" (Palmer, 1993, p. 74) .

In the spaces of this chapter I have tried to recover and shed light onto the spiritual and aesthetic interconnections of art making and teaching. The

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nature of art and teaching is filled with words we hesitantly call aesthetics, spirituality, and creativity. These words are hard to language and understand even though they are an integral part of every human being. The weight of these words can influence and determine the ethical or unethical balance of our relationship with others and our environment.

When we shop, we carefully check labels in store clothing: how much cotton, rayon, silk, polyester? Will my new nightgown shrink or fade when I wash it? Should I use hot or cold washing water, regular or delicate drying cycle? The blend of the fabric I call art and teaching is woven with the fibers we call aesthetics, spirituality and creativity. I am asking consumers of education to shop carefully and select those materials that come from organically grown spiritual soil and woven by the hands, hearts, and minds of human energy. Teachers-as-artists select aesthetic fibers that reveal the harmony and order of God's design. They leave the expensive, elite bolts on the shelves. They shop for material that covers their students with the human warmth of connectedness with the universe, and they work to recover each one's unique and harmonious place in the workings of the overall design.

Teachers-as-artists continue to shake out the material of their classrooms, disturbing and awakening its stagnant position, opening up creative spaces for it to breathe. Fox tells us that creativity is energy. The material of the classroom must not lay crumpled haphazardly nor sit neatly

folded in dormant conditions. The element of art in the classroom joins the community so that its members can share joy and pain as a unified, organic whole.

### Classrooms-as-Paintings

I want to close this chapter with a walk through an art gallery that displays a series of aesthetic compositions entitled “classrooms-as-paintings.” Two particular paintings catch my attention. Both of these framed classroom portraits present teachers and students at work within a school setting. Each composition is aesthetic in nature, carefully designed and rendered to reveal the overall design of a particular teaching and learning environment.

Picture Number One has been methodically arranged and constructed to display a polished replica of the Madeleine Hunter lesson design, a composition I presented and talked about in Chapter I. The theme of her subject matter is grounded in the seven-point lesson plan that effectively holds the elements of the image in place. It is a very safe composition to enter into. Like a paint by number kit, if I follow directions and stay in the lines, I will reach a successful ending. There are no surprises in this picture. The rules and techniques will lead me to a guaranteed finish line, a prescribed image if I do what I am told by the one who knows, the one in charge - the teacher.

The overall design of Picture Number One reveals a repetitive pattern of regimented lines and shapes that speak of order, rightness, and compliance



to authority. The colors and textures are tailored to fit harmoniously and not disrupt the overall movement and beat of the design. The shapes are carefully cut, standardized puzzle pieces that fit perfectly in their prescribed places.

Below Picture Number One is a stack of handouts with information about the purchase of this painting. This framed classroom portrait can be reproduced economically with guaranteed accuracy of colors and textures. Copies reveal an amazing likeness to the original, and reproduction requires a minimum of human input. School systems that place significant purchase orders are eligible for discounts on inservice teacher training sessions.

As I glance away from the neat and tidy images of Picture Number One, another painting on the opposite side of the wall catches my attention. This painting has a note posted underneath that reads: "work in progress." A medley of diverse lines, textures, and colors appears to be moving over and under the surface of the composition. The movement and rhythm flow from the energy of relationship between the members and the subject matter of this classroom scene. The images reach out and awaken the spectators from their passive stance and pull them into the active space of the composition. This picture is more risky. It is not as safe as Picture Number One. It has no guarantees or gimmicks. It needs my human spirit, not just my compliance, not just my obedience. Its theme speaks of the joys and struggles of freedom.

This picture's overall design reveals an organic variety of shapes that respond to the energy and tension of their relationship. Picture Number Two

is more costly to create and cannot be reproduced. There are no two alike and no generic brands. The materials for this picture cannot be bought in bulk, one-size-fits-all varieties. Each part of its design is unique and requires the commitment of human input.

As I stand before both of these two paintings, I am reminded that we as teachers have the freedom to select which painting hangs in our classroom. Both of these particular paintings are aesthetic. They both work as a classroom design. But as a teacher, which picture do I want to paint? Which composition do I want my classroom to be?

Another question to ask is: Can I choose more than one picture for my classroom? And this dissertation is all about the affirmative answer to this question. I believe that human nature gives us the “response-ability” (Huebner, 1984, p. 114) to change the pictures of our learning and our lives. I believe that my students and I can enter picture number one and alter the nature of its design. I believe that the warmth of our human touch can soften the petrified forms of aesthetic, mandated curriculums. I believe that teachers and students can move together and shift the weight of the moral scale to recover the ethical and moral nature of our classrooms. Our human nature is blessed with the ability to move and think in the gray areas of our lives. Human beings are not confined to “black and white” spaces and “either/or” dualities. The intricate design of our human nature, made in the image and likeness of God, challenges us to mix and match, to rummage and sort, and to

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choose a variety of pieces and parts that join together to create a whole spiritual, aesthetic picture that portrays our compassionate nature in its and our best light.

Chapter III helps us re-member, recover, and celebrate the God-given spiritual and aesthetic nature of design in our everyday lives. It helps us distinguish creative order from regimented orderliness. In the space of this chapter, we as teachers come to gather in the art of relationship to blend the carefully chosen fibers of our classrooms and strengthen the creative spirit of our learning. It sets the stage for Chapter IV's curtain to rise and reveal the true stories of kindergarten teachers. Both chapters come together to present a three-dimensional scene of teaching as a living collage. Classrooms-as-compositions hang like narrative tapestries woven together by threads that run over and under the roots of many different pictures of learning.

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## CHAPTER IV

### THE TELLING

There are, it may be, so many kinds of voices in the world, and none of them is without significance. (1st Corinthians 14:10)

I am attracted to educators with whom I share a passionate search to understand and nurture the ways that children (and adults) make meaning in their lives. These are educators who have found ways to stretch the boundaries of their curriculums and cultivate our children's integrative natures. Calkins (1983) tells us that "it is not children but adults who have separated art, song, and play (p. 35)." My studies and writings work to chip away at these walls that isolate and confine educators within their separate disciplines. In previous chapters I have woven my own personal experiences in between the well known voices of educators, philosophers, researchers, and writers. As this dissertation unfolds to reveal my search into the art of teaching, I move from the fabric of my own experiences and the writings of other educators to seek out the voices of teachers whom we rarely hear because they are actively engaged in their classrooms with our youngest learners. Chapter IV reveals the telling experiences of three kindergarten teachers helping me sort out how aesthetics and the art of teaching really work in a real classroom.

### To Relate in Order

As I sorted through the transcripts of my interviews with the kindergarten teachers I began to notice the power of this process I call "the telling." I looked up the word "tell" in the unabridged dictionary and found that one of its meanings is: "to relate in order." "In order"- here again, we meet this simple prepositional phrase that connotes a kind of unfolding aesthetic condition. It is aesthetic in nature because it speaks of sequence, arrangement, or patterns that help us understand or grasp something more fully. But it also carries another kind of understanding that speaks of making connections. We tell in order . . . to do, to become, to move forward or toward something else. And when we replace the verb, "tell" with its synonym, "relate," we begin to extend beyond ourselves toward otherness and possibility. It offers more than just a description. Relating carries that tacit dimension of kinship and belonging. It calls to mind the etymological roots of the word, art, meaning "to join." The art of telling pulls us closer and joins us together in order to relate. In these interviews the teachers and I were again like seamstresses with precious material like I spoke about in Chapter III. As we pieced together each others' experiences and truths, the threads of our words ran over and under one another to alter and reinforce the substance of our new and used fibers.

One premise of my dissertation is that the art of teaching spreads itself across many kinds of classrooms in our schools. Fine arts teachers are not the

only educators who provide experiences in art making with their students. By this I mean that art making is more than organized instruction about how to paint, draw, or sculpt. What I am writing about is the aesthetic connection between art and teaching. I am speaking of teachers-as-artists who work with their students just as painters and sculptors work with the subject and media of their respective fine arts. During my eleven years as an itinerant art specialist, I spent a lot of time in elementary classrooms, and I remember feeling the presence of this special kind of art making in many rooms where teachers and students came together daily in order to learn.

#### Begin Where Our Children Begin

In my study I have chosen to begin where our children begin their formal education - in kindergarten. These rooms are filled with young children who bring so much of themselves into their classroom each day. It is here that teachers are reminded daily by these energetic, active bodies that they are teaching children, not subjects or objects. The physical nature of these rooms provides informal and open spaces that accommodate flow and movement. The children in kindergarten work and play at communal tables that encourage attitudes of cooperation and sharing. They are not confined to individual desks placed in orderly rows or groups. The kindergarten rooms offer more space and time for teachers and students to interact and create patterns of meaning with one another and the materials of their room. These are the obvious signs of the presence of aesthetics in kindergarten classrooms,

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but I want to go below the surface. I need to look beyond the visual clues and listen to the voices and stories of kindergarten teachers as their language helps me recover the meaning of their teaching as a form of art.

This leg of my journey moves out of the professional journals, libraries, and universities and into the lives of experienced teachers who have spent a total of forty-one years in the kindergarten classroom. When I was teaching elementary art full time, we called it “being in the trenches.” This is the place where teachers roll up their sleeves and get in there and rub elbows with their students on a daily schedule that includes things like tardy bells, lunch money collections, and bus duty. They arrive to the classroom each day prepared to be teachers, mothers, fathers, nurses, secretaries, playground supervisors, custodians, counselors, and social workers. In this chapter I want to listen as these three kindergarten teachers tell about their experiences in the classroom. I taught with two of these teachers for eight years, and I attended graduate school with the third teacher. All three teachers are wives and mothers, and all three have devoted their professional careers to teaching young children in the public schools.

Inez has three grown children. She began teaching at the primary level in the mid 1960s. She has worked with kindergarten children for eleven of her seventeen years as a classroom teacher. For the past four years, Inez has been teaching a “combination class” that blends kindergarten and first grade in one classroom. She has come to believe that blended age groups

provide students with a richer, more diverse setting to learn from and help one another.

Julia began her teaching career in the 1970s as an elementary music teacher. After two years of accommodating itinerant scheduling and the product oriented nature of music performances, she became certified as a primary classroom teacher. Of her seventeen years of teaching, she has spent the last fifteen in the kindergarten classroom. Eight years into her teaching, she completed a Masters Degree concentrating on differentiated learning styles to benefit environmentally deprived young children. Julia is married with two school-aged children, so she experiences the daily balancing and juggling act of combining and managing the roles of both mothering and teaching.

Jane began teaching on the pre-kindergarten and primary level in the 1960s. Fourteen of her twenty years has been on the pre-kindergarten and kindergarten level. She currently teaches fourth grade. Jane has recently completed her Ph.D. in Curriculum and Teaching at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. Her graduate studies focused on critical thinking skills of young learners. She has five grown children and two grandchildren.

Because of the limited time and resource factors of the graduate program schedule, I made a decision to focus my dissertation search to teachers who have spent most of their professional lives in primary classrooms. In addition, because the kindergarten classrooms provide such

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fertile ground for the study of aesthetics, I plan to use this dissertation as a foundation and springboard for future studies. I hope to extend my search to tellings that include upper elementary, middle school, and high school teachers as I continue to explore this concept of recovering aesthetics in our classrooms.

### The Design of the Teacher Interviews

The three kindergarten teachers in my study exemplify this concept of artist/teacher. These teachers work in the medium of human growth and development with their young, eager students. When they teach, they create a living design that is a lot like a live mobile, with all its parts (teacher and students) moving in relation to one another as they go about learning from each other. I want to listen and learn about their kind of art making, as they reveal it in the language of their medium. These three classroom teachers are telling us stories that will help us make more concrete connections between the relationship of art and teaching. And I want to use the language of their meaning making in this research project to help other teachers recover and welcome the presence of aesthetic design and artistry in their classrooms.

The voices of these teachers can be used to relate in order to help more teachers understand and draw from the aesthetic nature of teaching, regardless of the subject they teach. The tellings give order and meaning to the words and experiences of these teachers. The tellings reveal patterns that connect us and our teaching. The tellings unfold toward new understandings

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about the nature of the classroom. The tellings are our lessons of learning as they validate and join teachers together to mingle within the aesthetic spaces of the art of teaching.

The interview questions I chose were designed to encourage the kindergarten teachers to think reflectively about themselves: what teaching means to them, describing themselves and their classrooms, how they think children learn, their passions and struggles in their teaching, the presence of caring and relationship in their classrooms. I will encourage each teacher to take a close, reflective look, and then describe what it is that she carries every day into her classroom. What are those personal truths they share with their children? How do they share them? How do they unfold in the lives of the teacher and her children?

I want to spread the interview transcripts out and begin to work and play with the design of their relationships. What similarities and differences do I find in their teaching patterns? What kinds of rhythm and balance are created among the narratives? What is the focal point or center of interest in their teaching?

### The Landscape of My Study

I am trying to describe the ineffable nature of the art of teaching in the spaces of this chapter. Let me try to explain the difficulty of this task. I am trying to pick up this aesthetic verb (teaching-as-artist) and allow it to run across the palms of my opened hands just long enough for me to feel its

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presence and speak of its essence in a non-linear language and schema. Will I find the presence of aesthetic teaching within the crowded classroom spaces of our educational machines? And if I find it, can I explore it without crushing it? Can I describe it without confining it to a prefabricated mold? Can I hold it and yet allow it to remain free, without imposing boundaries and formulas on its organic shape? This study is my journey into this magical, temporal space where I feel the glimmer of emergent knowing just often enough to keep me moving along the path toward a working definition for “aesthetic teaching.”

I chose the primordial fabric of the kindergarten classroom to begin my search because these young communities house such active movement and rich texture. As the personal reflections and stories of these kindergarten teachers began to unfold, I listened for their voices to redefine this concept of teaching. I wanted to explore this fabric of teaching and recover the aesthetic fibers lying silently beneath the dust of directive goals, objectives, and fail safe, static recipes that are so often imposed on our classroom teachers.

The interviews led me down the aesthetic path, but at the same time they also guided me in another unexpected direction. As I read and re-read the transcripts, I sensed another level of meaning making between the lines and spaces of these teachers’ words. Personal identities began to emerge underneath the glow of the fluorescent highlighters as each teacher spoke openly about her everyday experiences with her young students. I found that

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as these teachers defined themselves in relation to teaching, the names they were giving themselves were the same names I gave myself-as-artist. As I recovered and defined the art of teaching I was simultaneously naming and defining self-as-artist for both these kindergarten teachers and me.

In this narrative I have chosen the metaphor of fabric to help me language this tacit knowing about the power of the art of teaching. The fabric of teaching is a blend of textures and colors that are woven by teachers and students in the dialectic process of coming to know. The threads of its aesthetic parts are integral to the design and cannot be pushed into the margins or tacked on at the end of this chapter. Therefore, whenever I quote the teachers, I will italicize any words they speak that are aesthetic in nature so as to emphasize the natural interweave present in the art of teaching.

### Teacher-as-Artist

When Madeleine Grumet (1993) spoke about the art of teaching, she focused on three key elements in her picture of aesthetic teaching: "the giving of names, curriculum, and relation" (pp. 206-207). Grumet's article helped me organize and frame the material of my study, as I began to explore the patterns and repetitions in the transcripts of my teachers' discourses. Grumet (1993) tugs on the threads of our gatherings in Chapter III when she reminds us again that "no one knows alone. We come to know in relation to one another" (p. 207). The element of relation is more than likely the primary pattern of this aesthetic fabric of teaching. Meaningful, dialectic relation binds

all elements of a design together. It runs through the strong and resilient, yet flexible and sensitive fibers as it stretches across and creates a composition of aesthetic community in the classroom environment.

Madeleine Grumet (1993) talks about the art of teaching as an aesthetic catalyst, as it “invites us to play with the material, to mix what is chosen with what is imposed. All artists struggle with the resistance of material to our imaginations” (p. 207) . She nudges me to play with meanings, metaphors, and language in my writing. Grumet personifies my definition of writing-as-art.

I will use Grumet’s three aesthetic elements (naming, curriculum, and relation) as a frame for my schema in this study; however, as I reviewed the transcripts of my kindergarten teachers, I began to notice how the element of naming became a predominant theme in the picture of my study.

Throughout the interview all three teachers consistently use the roots of **verbs** to describe themselves: *listener, learner, interpreter, questioner, builder, modeler, guider, gatherer, believer, researcher, changer, gardener, designer, sculptor, caretaker, cheerleader, risker*. For me this speaks of movement and action that creates a dynamic rather than static condition within a classroom where both teachers and students are coming to know in their active and present relationship with one another. Teacher-as-artist allows space for improvisation and welcomes the unexpected as an expected

piece of her picture. Sartre speaks of how this attentiveness to the present welcomes the unfolding of the experience:

As everyone knows, there is no pre-defined picture for him [sic] to make; the artist applies himself to the composition of a picture, and the picture that ought to be made is precisely that which he will have made. (cited in Kearney, 1988, p. 242)

These interviews focus on a selected group of teachers who will remind us that the voices are always here. We need only to pause and listen. Every element of our classroom has a voice that speaks to the main parts of its design, Students and teachers are our textures, colors, shapes, and forms finding their places in the classroom composition. Listen as they speak. Watch how the members of the classroom become a living design within the community spaces - human mobiles that are always moving in response to their relationship with the whole. Hear all the different ways they “come to know,” as students and teachers make that which was not before.

### Naming

In the giving of names, Grumet (1993) says that “the art of teaching invites teachers to have children participate in the construction of their identities in the classroom” (p. 206) . In my study I want to apply this concept and adjust my lens toward teacher identity as I explore my teachers’ responses to such questions as: “How would you describe yourself as a teacher? What does teaching mean to you? What are your passions, struggles?” Grumet (1993) says that names are given to us by others as well as

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by ourselves. What we choose to call ourselves shapes the nature of our response to others and to our environment.

When a teacher surrounds herself with the materials of the classroom, she is ready to enter into dialectic relationship in the art of making that which was not before. Maxine Greene (1984) calls this “the realization of what is not yet, . . . in the yearning towards possibility” (p. 134). One teacher called herself a *gatherer*: “I gather together as many different kinds of materials I can possibly get.” One teacher languages, “I’ve thrown out um. . . a goal, so to speak, or a mission . . . or a task. But I let them get into . . . an organization of how they have to work through the *process* to come up with the product.” Another teacher called her children the gatherers: “That’s one of the goals of a first grader. . . to gather information.” The act of gathering invites teachers and students to draw a variety of elements around them, enriching their environment with contrast and diversity in order to create patterns of meaning and order for themselves. “Here’s a huge array of ideas, events, circumstances, and people’s stories. *Now let’s see where they fit together.*” Notice how this teacher speaks in present tense as she invites her students to join with her to make new meaning together. There is no preconceived correct teacher handout for this experience. The learning event grows in the midst of all those gathered.

Teacher-as-artist moves within the spaces of learning, orchestrating, improvising, and facilitating the making of meaning. All three of the

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teachers called themselves *facilitators*. "I'm like a facilitator, and I help them [children] explore and learn through cooperative, small groups, partners, . . . and all I do is just have things ready, and they help. . . they teach each other." Another teacher spoke of the dynamics of the facilitative process that guides the children down their own individual learning paths:

I am a big believer that they [children] learn through *interaction with their environment*. . . that anything I tell them only has significance if it has been tied to something they've done [before]. And really, my job is more the facilitator, and..... that I help them *interpret their experiences*. I provide the environment. Then I either reflect, comment, or help them analyze....and *tie one experience to another, and draw relationships* between those two. So in their brains, they're putting down a network. I look at it as sort of a web. You have one nugget of information that you've gleaned, and you're going to tie another piece to it. It might be a direct relationship or it might come down a different channel. I want them to look at it from as many facets as they can, because then they may be tied over here and then they may tie a knot there and come down this way, so that their network is very intense... So, I don't teach them anything. I don't teach them a thing. I provide the opportunity, the environment, and help them *reflect on their experience*.

One teacher calls herself a *catalyst*:: "The teacher can offer material in such a way that it excites the child's *curiosity*, and out of this material, the child learns things that this child needs to know. If it comes from the child, it's going to stick." These teachers put together the materials of their classrooms. They construct, build, design, . . . make an environment that accommodates and nurtures the physical, emotional, and intellectual movement of children. The space they create goes far beyond the walls of



their classrooms. They burrow into the soil of the foundation. One teacher calls herself a *gardener*. “I feel like I plant the seed - a seed of compassion for others, a seed of joy of learning.”

“And yet, I can be like the facilitator to keep it going, to provide that environment.” This teacher reminisces: “I used to stay at school running off papers, and now that’s not it at all anymore. It’s gathering information that I can throw out at them, . . . and see what they can come up with. [Before] I was holding them back. We were giving them knowledge, but it wasn’t meaningful. It wasn’t sticking. I was keeping them from being that best possible person, *finding themselves . . . their own way*.” This teacher was able to let go of her old naming for her self-as-teacher in the process of finding her self-as-learner.

Teacher-as-artist invites every individual in her classroom to sculpt or build their own design for coming to know. She knows that making meaning “that sticks” is embedded in each child’s own self-created pattern. She focuses on creating an environment where everyone including herself is named a *learner*.

All three teachers named themselves as *listeners, observers, questioners, and interpreters*. One teacher says, “I’m the *observer* also so that I can see children manipulating the environment. I’ll see which direction their learning style is going, and how quickly their pace of learning is developing.” This kind of classroom becomes an artist’s studio where the

process emerges through intense perceptual awareness and focus on the subject at hand. I am reminded here that for the artist, “seeing is forgetting the name of the thing[s] one sees” (1992, UNC-G drawing class anonymous quote). The question becomes far more revealing and intriguing than the answer. Teacher-as-questioner allows space for pauses and reflection and finds time in the search to explore unexpected paths that may not necessarily lead to a predefined ending.

One teacher said, “When something a child says doesn’t come through very clearly, then you need to stop and you need to talk about it.” And later on, “When something is going on and I’m not real sure, then I need to *step back and just watch, and write down what I’m seeing*. I do that a lot. A lot of times I will go over and say, ‘tell me what you’re doing. Explain this to me.’” And later, when she was unpacking more of her truths, she said, “I’m honest with them and just say, ‘I don’t know, but I can help you find out.’ *We find the answer together and half the time I’m just as amazed as they are.*”

Another teacher says, “I don’t have to be **the** teacher . . . I can learn from them also.” Teachers-as-learners stretch themselves, their children, and their curriculum beyond the dimensions of their classrooms. One teacher says,

I try to help the children, and I tell them, “I’m not the fount of knowledge, but I’ll show you how to work toward knowledge. I’ll show you resources. Every single time you use your brain, it’s like a rubber band that stretches. It never goes back to the same size. So **any** opportunity I can give you to help you make the decision that will help you learn, then I want **you** to do it, right down to asking, ‘where can I find the piece of paper?’”

All three teachers began their narratives with the genesis theme. One teacher says, "My role as a teacher is to *start the process [of learning]* and to help the children understand it as a *way of life*." Another teacher says, "Since I work with **young** children, I'm making a significant difference everyday they're there. I'm making my impression . . . and playing my little part." And the third teacher says, "Teaching means to me . . . making a difference in the lives of those little beings, helping them believe in themselves, making a place where they can feel safe and not be afraid of taking a risk or failing. and helping them become the best possible person they can become, because this is their **beginning**." Throughout their narratives, I hear the teachers name themselves as aesthetic sculptors. They respect and handle their media with great care as they mold and carve the beginnings of dialectic relationship with these young learners.

### Curriculum

The second element that Grumet cites in the art of teaching is the nature of curriculum. What materials do these three teachers choose, and how do they spread them out into the lives of their students? Some questions I asked were: "How do you think your children learn? What would I see if I walked into your classroom? Teachers in all classrooms are given certain mandated materials, but the design of the distribution of these packaged goods reflects the condition of aesthetic teaching in the classroom. All three teachers seem to implement specific yet flexible designs to facilitate

meaning making in their classrooms. The element of student choice and decision making seem an important piece that shapes the material of all three teachers. As I focus on the element of curriculum, I want to notice these teachers' priorities as they create spaces for learning in their classrooms.

"I . . . ask the right questions, so to speak, to get their minds thinking. I don't give them the answers like I thought I had to when I first went into teaching. I don't have all the answers." This same teacher goes on to reveal some of her own truths embedded in what she has learned from her students:

When you believe in yourself, you trust your children, you *sit back and watch how they learn*. I started watching that they learn a great deal through talking with each other, sharing experiences, watching each other, helping each other, . . . [learning] much more than they get from the teacher.

Another teacher also trusts kids to teach each other. She speaks of the child (who may have more experience) "enriching the environment for the other children" through their interaction. She goes on to say that "even if I'm just having a conversation at group time with **one** child, **every** child in the class hearing that conversation hears it *on different levels*. So we're off. I call it the stratified approach. I know that children are such that in most activities they're gaining something. *Different children are learning different things from the same activity*. That's really how our classroom functions." Later when this teacher is talking about a new math strategy, she says, "Everybody's participating, maybe on a *different level*, but your brain is

getting, . . . I call it getting bigger because you're approaching the problem and *looking for a solution.*"

Classrooms that cultivate learners generate their own kind of energy - an energy fueled by the children. One teacher calls some of her kids "*sparks because they ignite something, . . . and it'll get going in your classroom, and [the children] really bounce off each other quite well, intellectually.*" She calls these charged times in her classroom "*energizers that keep things fresh, new, alive.* If you channel your class in the right direction, they'll do a lot of that for you. A lot of times I'll have a couple children with the most unbelievable *creative streaks, as wide as a river.* And they'll get started on a project, and it'll just, . . . the whole class will become involved before you know it." She adds that as her confidence builds, "I can throw that lesson plan right out the window if I see something else developing. That to me is the **fun** part of teaching."

"I really try to get the children to be the main focus of the room. It works best for me that way." This teacher is talking about the focal point or center of interest in the composition of her classroom.

We actually base a lot of what we do in the classroom on things that are going on in the child's world at that time. Learning is what it's about in my classroom, not teaching. There are times when I tell my kids, "I'm not going to say a word because I don't want to interrupt **your** learning."

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This teacher also talked about how kids “learn through experiencing what goes on in the classroom environment.” Another teacher follows up on this theme: “My classroom is based on the premise that all children are capable learners. Some need more practice. Some need more guidance. All children are capable of learning, and my job is to provide them with an environment that will maximize their learning potential.” She talks about the making of “*common ground*.” “We make our own experiences in the classroom and then go from there. The nature trail is a source of a lot of common ground for us.”

All three teachers stress the importance of laying a foundation of fertile ground for learning in the spaces of their classrooms. I asked, “What is the color of your classroom?” One teacher’s answer seemed to speak of the common ground of all three when she responded that her room is like the color of a “chameleon.”

*The color of my classroom depends on what’s going on in there. It’s all kids’ work. The color on any one day depends on what the kids are doing, and what they’ve put up on the wall and how they express themselves. The color [in these rooms and in works of fine art] depends on where you are, and where the children are, and what you’re looking for. Because it’s all there - all at once and at the same time.*

### Relation

“Teaching means to me *making a difference . . . making a difference* in children’s lives.” Two of the teachers spoke of this personal

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empowerment that they feel and pass on to their children. "I am making a difference.." "So I feel powerful." I continue to notice this present tense in the voices of these teachers. The present tense speaks of hope, energy, and power. "I'm playing my *little part*.and that's a *big part* of teaching for me." These teachers understand that it is only in relationship with others that their voices can be heard and their messages can go beyond the temporal environment of the classroom. I hear positive commitment in their voices. "When you're working with four-, five-, or six-year-olds, you are **always** optimistic. There are very few times when you can look at a person and say, 'there's not much hope here.'"

Meaningful dialectic is the primary pattern within the art of teaching. As artists we come to know our subjects through personal, aesthetic discourse. Every part of a painting or sculpture exists only in its relationship to all the other parts. Nothing or no one stands alone.

All three teachers speak of relationship through the language of responsibility. As kindergarten teachers, their early focus centers on the construction of a common foundation based on respect and cooperation. One teacher says, "We have to spend three or four weeks at the beginning of the year to *build that team approach*," Another teacher adds, "You know what your groundwork is. I mean your most important thread. You will go **no where** as a class until *every child understands that you have respect for the type of person they are*." And the third teacher says, "The children are

*responsible for helping each other.* They are responsible for *caring* about each other. That's a part of what it means to be in a group. We don't have secrets. We do a lot of *cooperative* work. *School is a place where you go to get help.*" And the first teacher adds here, "There is a *trust* too, between the children and the teacher. You know, [the child says] 'now this person is my friend, and if I need help, I can come ask her. She can help me.' And I had to build a trust with them too, . . . it was like a *mutual trust*." This teacher goes on to talk more about the design of relationship:

Even with the little children, when I put them in groups, you can see the analytical child take over, organizing it, putting it on paper, and the other ones doing the work, because they can't do the paper and pencil work. . . but they're doing the hands on. . . putting the project together. *We've got to have each other to get the job done.*

This teacher is working with the art principles of contrast, variety, balance, harmony, and unity as she allows her students to sort and adjust themselves to the parts of the tasks that they each do well. They are using the contrast of their talents to create harmony and unity in their working with each other. The variety of gifts and personalities (textures, colors, shapes) that each child brings to the composition of the process creates an aesthetic experience, designed by the teacher-as-artist.

I listen to one teacher talk about her relationship with one of her students who lacks self-confidence:



She needs reassurance about every 60 seconds. "How do you like this? Did I use the right color?" Well, I refuse to get into it. I'll *reflect her feelings back on her, or help her formulate a better question*. If she comes up and says, "How do you like this color?" I'll say, "I see you chose blue." OK, it's right back in her court, and I haven't said, "yes, no, great, good." . . . which brings me to. . . I don't want my children to feel that they are doing things for me. *They are doing things for themselves*. . . . Because then children become *autonomous learners*. And they're not trying to do it to make the grade, or to impress so and so, or the teacher.

Another teacher says, "You have to *believe in your children*. You have to *believe that they can do, and they can be functional and responsible*. They know that *I depend on them*." She goes on to say that "it's important to have a *relationship* with your children where *they can see you . . . all the emotions*. They can see you being happy, being disappointed, being mad, being sad."

The teacher who spoke of the autonomous learner says, "Kindergarten is significant. *We are painting the child's first picture about his/her relationship with his/her school*." Peter London (1989) calls our relationships with people a "communion, breaking out of solitariness and silence of one dimension of ourselves and making contact with the other (p. 74).

When we feel safe enough to share the "stuff we're made of," (and I call this the "spirituality of show and tell"), a new growth of relationship begins to blossom in the classroom. This new growth that I call *respect* is a bountiful plant that nurtures our human spirit and personal truths. When respect lives in a classroom, it moves and grows as a hermeneutic circle that

fosters care for self, care for others, and care for our environment. Its reproductive potential is limitless, because the roots of this plant are embedded in the rich soil of human relationship. The narratives of these three teachers reveal and celebrate the spiritual and aesthetic dimensions of relationship within the rich community and composition of their kindergarten classrooms.

### The Completion of This Painting

I chose to begin my search at the entrance of our children's educational path because beginnings live in special soil that holds seeds of hope, anticipation, firstness, and freshness. I recall two teachers speaking of the positive, optimistic nature of this primordial territory: "there are very few times when you can look at a person and say, 'there's not much hope here,'" and "I'm making a significant difference everyday. . . because this is their beginning."

I listened as these kindergarten teachers and their stories helped me make the connection between art and education. These are the teachers who live this condition called artistry and personify the words of Robert Henri (1923): "Where those [teachers] who are not artists are trying to close the book, he [sic] opens it, and shows there are still more pages possible . . . he does not have to be a painter or sculptor to be an artist. he can work in any medium" (p. 5) .

The interview process has been my canvas. The words on its surface have helped me begin to paint a new set of images that open up new possibilities about the art of teaching in our classrooms. Three kindergarten teachers and I met on this canvas to language our interpretations about the meaning of teaching in our lives. I carried certain expectations about what I would uncover in this process, but these teachers took me much deeper than I had anticipated into the design of the classroom composition. I expected to find balance, harmony, contrast, variety, movement, and rhythm within the pictures of these classrooms. I also expected to find nurture, care, and respect. But what I did not anticipate was the strong, interdependent pattern of relationship between the two. Like weft and warp in a weaving (the threads that run over and under one another) one set of threads cannot exist as a whole without the other. Without the weft, the warp just lies there in its separateness. I found the art of reciprocity: when two or more are joined together in aesthetic order their blend creates a surface that holds the substance of meaningful and loving relationship. The weave needs the aesthetic pattern to create a nurturing design capable of relationships of care. I could not have heard this connection by just listening to the teachers. I could not have seen this connection by just reading the transcripts. The connection came as I took the threads of these teachers' insights and began weaving and joining them to support one another. The image that emerged revealed a pattern that tells of the relationship not just between art and

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education but between art and love. Their stories were related in order to join the condition of nurture with the art of seeking. Aesthetics offers more than just new possibilities and beautiful images. How easy it is to become confined to this kind of limited connoisseur thinking when we isolate ourselves behind the walls of our disciplines. I must open the windows and doors of my art room in order to see beyond the beauty of its surface. It is here at the crossroads of our meetings that we recover the integral pattern that holds us steady enough to trust and welcome others on our journey.

The design of the telling weave reveals the power of relationship as I hear one teacher remind me that, "we've got to have each other to get the job done." Here is the voice that tells me that I must love my art enough to let go of it and reach out for support from the otherness in my life. My art fibers cannot work together without the help of others. Here is the voice of experience that tells me that the children in our classrooms cannot learn and grow in isolation. Like the warp, they lie dormant and separated without one another. They cannot read without writing and drawing. They cannot add and subtract without working with patterns. They cannot care for one another without letting go of themselves long enough to reach out for the threads of support from each other.

I found it interesting that even though my teachers represent three different levels of education - B.A., M.Ed., and Ph.D - the language of all three educators embodies the same academic and personal messages that are

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learned from experience in the classroom. Degrees do not take the place of being there with young learners on a daily basis. These kind of insights need the soil of classroom teaching to blossom and mature.

I believe that aesthetics is alive in all classrooms. Unfortunately in many classes, it lies dormant and atrophied underneath the weight of standardization and mandated curriculums. Kindergarten classrooms carry lighter baggage. After the children complete an initial screening, they are not subjected to standardized testing and textbooks filled with programmed instruction. They become the resources and material of the classroom. The big and little people in these kindergarten spaces seem to take and to have more room and more time to bring themselves to the classroom and appreciate the gifts each other have to share. With this canvas nearing the edges of its completion, I can anticipate stretching new pieces across the frame of other sets of teachers as I continue to explore and recover the presence of this special weave of aesthetics at other levels.

As an art teacher, I was able to make a strong connection with these teachers. I found that we were all dealing within a spiritual, aesthetic dimension in our philosophies. The media might be different at times, but the core and substance of who we are as teachers is the same. In our classrooms, regardless of the material or subject, we bring the sparkle of human experience and identity into focus only through meaningful aesthetic

and loving relationship not only with each other but with the everydayness of our environment.

In my search I need the relationship and discourse of other teachers to explore and language it for myself. The unexpected gift of these three interviews was the personal nature of this dialogic process. As I defined the art of teaching through the narratives of these three women, I was also defining my self-as-artist. The design of this dialogic discourse moved into the spaces of my own personal inquiry; and I was reminded that it is only in relation to others that I am able to define myself and the material of my life as an artist and a teacher.

## CHAPTER V

### THE RE-CREATION

Chapter V reminds me that I can never breathe a sigh of relief and say, "now I'm done." "Knowledge and art are an ongoing process" (Goetzmann, 1973, p. 149). This dissertation on classroom-as-art studio has no finite boundaries, no time frame, no easy to follow formulas. In the space of this chapter I meet at "the rich juncture of the new and the old" (Dewey, 1934, p. 60). Hegel tells me about "harmonic order" (Kaufmann, 1956 p. 132), and Dewey (1934) reminds me that "there is no rhythm without recurrence" (p. 166). This chapter moves my conception of teacher-as-artist forward on the common ground of the past in relation to the present and future. And then it summons me back to Chapter I where I listen for the call to my next lesson. Recreation is again and again, never resting for long, always fluid like the Niagara water falls Hegel described on one of the few pleasure trips he allowed himself.

In these falls one sees eternally the same image, and sees at the same time that it is never the same. Eternal life, the tremendous motion in it. (cited in Kaufmann, 1965, p. 306)

I think of Eternal life as my recognition of the presence of God in my everyday life, and when I become aware of those brief flashes, I catch a mere

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glimpse of the tremendous motion and energy within and around me. Zillions of small, unsuspecting droplets of water tumble and fall over one another creating the awesome power of the Niagara Falls. Thousands of words, insights, images, and thoughts tumble around one another inside my head. Which ones will fall out onto this paper and tell me what I want to say?

I want Chapter V to tell some of what I've learned and picture how the newest threads of this dissertation fit within the well worn fabric of me as a teacher and a student. I am not new fabric. The pattern of my fifty-one years is still quite recognizable, but like the Niagara Falls, it is not the same as before. I cherish the way my new threads reawaken and alter my thinking as they run through my old, familiar patterns.

This dissertation process has been like the making of a large multi-dimensional tapestry, and as I near its ending, I look in awe at the complexity of its design. How will I ever language the meaning of these fibers that I so carefully interlaced throughout its surface? It stretches across me in soft and crumpled disarray like the warm sheets and comforter on my bed when I first awake in the morning. I need to straighten it out and then step back and take in the wholeness of its form. What can I say about the images of thoughts and connections that run through these last four chapters? What kind of pictures did I get when I superimposed my own experiences with those of other educators?

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I see before me a collage that runs through and beyond my graduate experiences back across the many seasons of my life. Chapter V helps me describe how this same image of me as a teacher is different this time around. What new images have emerged and how do they change my self-portrait of teacher-as-artist?

### Classrooms-as-Paintings

I would like to return to the art gallery that I visited in Chapter III - the gallery that displayed a series of aesthetic compositions entitled "classrooms-as-paintings." At that time I was taken by two very different portraits that represented the relationship of teachers and students in the classroom setting.

Picture Number One was organized methodically to represent order and predictability. Its tidy, neat composition revealed the values of rightness and the certainty of preplanning. The colors, textures, and shapes were carefully arranged and balanced so that everything in the picture had its own place and fit in its own space. The pattern and rhythm worked together to create a safe, readable picture. No part of the design either stood out garishly or slipped invisibly into the background. Since reproductions of such pictures are readily available and can be purchased at quite reasonable prices, a stack of order forms rested beneath the frame completing the efficient nature of Picture Number One.

Picture Number Two hung on the opposite wall. In place of the stack of order forms, just one sign rested below this frame, and it read: "work in

progress.” This picture appeared incomplete until I came closer and made myself personally available to its composition. It portrayed a feeling of movement and energy that called me to take part in the making of its design. This picture could not be reproduced or boxed in neat tidy packages. Its overall design flowed over and under the variety of lines, shapes, textures, and colors leaving open spaces that needed my input and commitment. This picture called to me join with it, entering into and responding to the wholeness of its message.

As I re-enter this gallery - my first visit since Chapter III, I wonder: What will I notice this time around? If the paintings are the same, will I see them in a new light? My affirmative reply answers the call of this dissertation. I want to listen more carefully to my response.

I approach Painting Number One. This time I see a clear, concise rendering of a classroom group portrait. As I take a closer look I can imagine that the night before this picture was made, several mothers were busy scrubbing and polishing some of these shiny, smiling faces. And then I become aware of my revision of this picture. What I saw as a painting in Chapter III is actually a commercial photograph of a very special second grade classroom that I was a part of in 1992-1993. I spent a year with these students and their energetic, dedicated, and young second-year teacher, Mr. Malmin. I remember the day the school photographer took our picture. He worked quickly and professionally, trying very hard to appear good-natured and in

control and priding himself on snapping up to eight hundred kids that day. There we were, there we are, all of our live bodies confined by but willingly accommodating this three-by-eight-inch glossy color print. I can see all twenty-eight faces as we sit or stand in three orderly rows looking and smiling at what? Perhaps at the thought of our future selves smiling back at this motley collection of ourselves in this frozen moment of time.

Photographs! No wonder this image could be reproduced and distributed so economically; however, photographs, despite their mechanically reproductive nature, can also awaken and recover feelings of love. And here, two chapters later, my way of seeing this picture has been transformed. I've stopped and looked beyond the surface to see that underneath this slick, assembly line picture are so many personal stories.

I notice Neal's quiet smile underneath his baseball cap which he has never removed since the first day of school. For the first time ever I see Kirk sitting motionless with his hands folded and resting quietly in his lap. There is Kathryn who looks so out of character in her pink floral Sunday dress and matching hair bow, and Kristin with her wise thoughtful far away gaze framed by her favorite head band. This is the first time I've seen Jeffrey smile. And curly-haired David, wearing his widest grin, anchors the spirit of our class where he stands proudly as the tallest second grader in the middle of the back row. I could continue as I revisit with each one of my children, but I could never tell the whole story even as I know it. My reminiscing informs

me that even though the format of this portrait appears commercial and standardized, the nature of its subject matter offers a very personal assemblage of human experiences. This picture of three rows of posed people opens a lot of windows into my thinking.

This time around the subject matters more than the formal order. In Chapter III my attention was focused on the portrait as an aesthetic composition. I allowed the design of its geometric shapes to dominate and overshadow the substance of its human form. I saw Picture Number One only as a stylized object and overlooked its potential to be a personalized subject.

This time around my earlier, formal critique goes beyond the surface of this design and transforms itself into an aesthetic inquiry that feels the human touch of this picture. It reminds me of the reconstructed, double imagery of holograms. Even more so this phenomenon is like the new, popular dual dimensional paintings now widely available as posters, calendar prints, and note cards. Within the frame of one of these paintings I can transform its repetitive two-dimensional pattern into a three-dimensional, recognizable image. In order to find and see this secondary, three-dimensional image I must concentrate my full attention on the two-dimensional design so fully that I let go of my directed focus and begin to see something anew inside this other co-created visual space.

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With this in mind, I want to return to Picture Number One and try to see and move through its composition and imagery and come into the space of the aesthetic design that reveals some of my own teaching attitudes. I look carefully at the relationship between the orderly design and the myriad of young, lively faces. Mr. Malmin, the second grade teacher, and I cannot guarantee a picture perfect expression from everyone. The photographer has a little more control in that he can choose the most opportune second in which to push the shutter. But the finished image portraying these twenty-nine faces, despite the planned orderliness, cannot be completely predetermined. How often as a teacher do I remember that I do not know the outcome of my lesson until my students and I live through the experience together? And even then, I can never know the totality of its effect on the students in my room. In Chapter IV one teacher talks about how teacher-controlled lesson designs create a one-dimensional, limited pattern that she calls "holding them [the students] back. . . .giving them knowledge, but . . . it wasn't sticking. I was keeping them from being that best possible person, finding themselves . . . their own way." When I am self conscious, and at other times, when I get lost in the effects of my technique or style, I catch myself needing to know that which is impossible: the outcome. When do I get stuck on these slick surface appearances of lesson designs? Whenever my performance as a teacher takes center stage over the questions and responses of my students. At these times in my teaching I run the risk of

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allowing my predetermined teaching style to dominate or negate the evolving form of my classroom. This same kindergarten teacher in Chapter IV remembers how she thought she had to “ask the right questions ...and give them [her students] the answers.” The dual, emerging images of Picture Number One help me loosen my grip on the absurdity of rightness and one-way-ness whenever I feel myself trying to plant the seeds of a perfect lesson or paint a portrait of a perfect classroom.

My critique of Picture Number One takes me back even further to the beginnings of this dissertation in Chapter I when I looked at its design in an even more defensive position. When I spoke judgmentally of marching through the steps of effective teaching , I created a picture that had no room for any redeeming qualities of my interpretation of this hard and fast lesson design.

Let me take us back for a moment to the pages of Chapter I where I was explaining and reacting to the regimen of Madeleine Hunter’s seven-point lesson plan. I called my review of her steps a march because the order and rhythm of this right way is repeated over and over to standardize and mechanize the lessons of our teaching, lest we fall astray. I returned to a teacher inservice that I experienced in the mid 1980s as all teachers in my school system were taught the system for effective teaching. As I named and described each of the seven steps in bold, resounding print, my aesthetic voice

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spoke out complementing (accentuating) the absurdity of the methodological Hunterization.

The series of effective teaching steps instilled in my colleagues and me remind me of Lamm's (1988) metaphor of hard and soft elements in the theories of instruction. He cited that in both the acculturation and socialization approaches of curriculum theory, "knowledge is regarded . . . as the hard and given element in the equation, [and the students are the soft element who] bear the brunt of whatever manipulation is necessary. [Instruction] . . . is designed to bridge the gap between the student and knowledge, . . . the given element in the equation" (p. 153). When I look at Picture Number One in relation to my march in Chapter I, I see in Lamm's metaphor the presence and power of our students' soft strength, and at the same time, I see a reflection of myself as the rock-like element I so strongly attacked in my critique of the seven-point lesson design.

The context of these different chapters, like a carefully kept scrapbook, helps me record and picture the growth in my thinking. As I sort through the changing pictures, I see also that this writing provides a mirror that reflects images of me in relation to the portraits that I critique in the metaphor of the art gallery. With each return to a specific picture I notice that my understanding and vision goes only as deep as my willingness to look beyond the surface of its image and get to the heart of its aesthetic design. It is important in this dissertation to follow the progression and understand the

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ways that I see and come to know myself as a teacher. Each time I return to a chapter, the meaning of my picture, my reflexive self, becomes a little more clear but never complete. A mirror always has room to show and tell more.

I look around the art gallery trying to locate Picture Number Two and notice that its spot has been filled with several new pieces of art work. The images are not the same as the one in Chapter III, but the styles are very similar, revealing the free flowing and energetic nature of the earlier painting.

One particular piece is not a painting or a drawing but a collage of a bunch of short writings placed randomly on a piece of 12 x 18 white drawing paper. The whole composition hangs inside a simple, medium brown wooden frame. A variety of somewhat jagged shapes is created by random groupings of linearly placed, printed words. The shapes of grouped sentences, attempting to fit inside an imaginary rectangle or square, look as if they were bumped or skewed off center as each student tried to keep their thoughts straight. I notice the variety of value gradations created by how hard or how lightly different messages have been carefully printed with pencil onto this plain white surface. Each group of lines celebrates its own unique handwriting style. The negative white space runs around the linear shapes like a maze of borders and margins throughout the composition, moving my attention along a random path from one message to the next. Some shapes stand alone as small islands, while others, like peninsulas, bump into or



extend out from one another. Mr. Malmin, the teacher, writes in one of the corners that becomes a focal point where several handwritings converge together to co-create a larger form. The variety and contrast of the assortment of grouped and scattered personal messages reveal the aesthetic elements of respect, care, and freedom that Mr. Malmin brought to the canvas of his classroom. He gave his children the space to seek, find, and create their own places on this unlined surface of relationship.

This design of words and sentences calls to me to come closer and read the contents of its form. As the letters and words come into focus, I recognize the names of my second grade students from Picture Number One. Though the media and style are quite different, both of these pictures are telling portraits of very special students. Picture Number Two portrays the farewell messages of twenty-six students and one teacher as it speaks strongly of the design of classroom relationship.

Jeffrey tells me, "I like the way you draw" and painstakingly signs his name in very curvy cursive letters (getting a head start on a skill he will learn next year in third grade). Both Jason and Matt mention my smile, and I'm glad they remember this "picture" of me. And Kathryn says "Thank you for helping me on my work. I will always 'rembmber' you." Corey writes in his unique style of invented spelling: "Thak you for hpeaing me you are spsul." "Well, Corey, your written thoughts makes me feel very special!" Again, I could fill the remainder of these Chapter V pages with the rest of their

messages, but I would only be scraping the surface of the whole story even as I know it.

As I took time to read the notes one by one, I didn't mind that I had to keep turning the picture in all different directions because the children's words were turned sideways, upside down, and right side up, depending on the position of the frame. The haphazard design of this portrait collage might bother a school photographer but I delighted in the way that its random quality enhanced the composition of its childlike nature.

As I step back and try to take in the substance of both Pictures Number One and Two I am aware that I am using a wider lens in this chapter that I call the "Re-creation." As I've moved through the chapters of this dissertation, I have begun to notice broader images of me as a teacher which stem from the re-creative process of seeing the old and familiar in new ways. My reflexive thinking in Chapter V provides me with a mirror that reflects new ways of seeing the familiar pictures that hang in the metaphor of my art gallery. My new view of the condition of order in Picture Number One helps me open several tightly shut doors of judgmental thinking about regimen and standardization. I felt a new sense of freedom when I was able to see through the formal order and find so much of the heart of the subject matter in this multi-dimensional photograph. I do believe that the nature of freedom cannot be supported or nurtured without the presence of some kind of order. But there are many different kinds of order. I think of the aesthetic

randomness of Picture Number Two. The dictionary defines random as having no purpose or pattern; however, when I look at this collage, I see an aesthetic design of intentional care and love. The other kind of order in Picture Number Two is woven firmly and lovingly into the nature of its purpose. Perhaps a formal order is not necessary in order for something to be aesthetic. Perhaps there are many different aesthetic paths for the teacher-as-artist to follow, and each time I return to my gallery, I have the opportunity to re-create anew.

### Teacher-as-Artist

As I rethink my experience in the art gallery I wonder: which picture is more like me as a teacher? My answer to that question is no longer as quick and certain as it used to be. I can no longer hurriedly slam my hand down on the buzzer to yell out, "Number Two!" I must go below the surface of my free-spirited nature and reveal the parts of my design that welcome order and precision. For instance, sometimes I like being told what to do and even how and when to do it. Often I notice myself thinking that I know the "right" answer. And an interrupted schedule is very disruptive to me! So where do I fit these geometric, predictable parts of me that welcome degrees of conformity and programming? I have learned that my clear-cut pieces have always been an integral and necessary part of my painting working to complement and balance my non-linear side. They are my contrasting elements that help round out the shape and form of my teaching. Last

weekend in the midst of an uplifting performance, singer, actor, dancer, Ben Vereen would often step back into the shadows and watch one of his talented musicians take center stage, saying, “Put the light on the man! Put the light on the man!” In this same way I need to step back more often and put the light on my contrasting parts that complement and celebrate the interdependent nature of my aesthetic design.

When I teach my art students about the color wheel, we step back and look at the colors in relation to one another. Colors side by side are called analogous families because they are related by the blending of two primary colors. The primaries, red and yellow, mix to produce a secondary color called orange. When these three analogous colors rest side by side, they so closely resemble one another that it is easy to mistake red for an orange. However, colors like orange and blue are opposite one another on the color wheel and react to one another very differently. Since orange is made only from red and yellow, it contains no blue pigment. Orange and blue placed side by side bear no resemblance and therefore complement one another. Blue brings out the orangeness of orange, and orange bring out the blueness of blue as no other colors can because these two colors represent the polarities of the color wheel. The dualities of complementary colors like orange and blue, yellow and violet, and red and green remind me that I need parts of both aesthetic paintings present within the fabric of my teaching.

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My graduate program, like an aesthetic classroom experience, has made more room within my teacher-as-artist painting as I learn to welcome more diversity into my design. Like a sprouting seed pushing against the groundedness of the soil my diverse nature creates the necessary tension for my growth. Leaving the art room this year to teach a different course, Institutions of Education, created patterns of anxiety that pulled hard on the tension of my well worn fabric. But this summer, when I return to the art room to teach two sections of Child Art and Teaching, I will stretch a stronger, more diverse piece of myself across the frame of my old and familiar curriculum. I will bring a wider lens of perception about the art of teaching to the art room. I will hold art education up to the light of the critical consciousness of my cultural studies department as I make more room for other kinds of threads in the design of my teaching.

I am learning that the uncomfortable presence of otherness pushes me beyond the complacency and acceptance of what I already know. The new and diverse threads have added complementary colors, textures, lines, and shapes to the pattern of my teaching, shedding new light on my old patterns. For instance I have come to know something new about my used self. All these years as an art teacher, I tried to keep the hard and rough edges of relationship confined inside the isolated, framed art works of my curriculum, unaware that the presence of conflict also resides within the canvas of the daily life of

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teachers, students and the materials of the classroom. It is within the making and working out of these struggles that my students and I grow.

The metaphor of the art gallery reminds me that regardless of which paintings I choose, I must be ready to put myself into the composition of the pictures that come into my classroom. The paintings must not become invisible paraphernalia that sit lifelessly like taken-for-granted things in our daily lives. Nor must they become unquestioned, rigid procedures that turn my curriculum design into a piece of efficient machinery. Whether side by side or mingled together, I must react to all the paintings. My active response to contrasting lines, shapes, textures, and colors provides the necessary tension for movement and balance in my teaching. Teacher-as-artist creates a backdrop that calls all members of the classroom to come forward and take turns committing their whole selves to the composition of center stage.

Passion and personal commitment are aesthetic elements of teaching that the writings of Hegel and Dewey helped me language. Dewey (1934) speaks of “a work of art [as] an organization of energies” (p. 191). Hegel tells me that the content of a canvas is designed to arouse “. . . passions so that the experiences of life do not leave us unmoved” (cited in Karelis, 1979, p. 46). Aesthetic patterns create spaces for “pushes and pulls . . . contradictions and expansions” (Dewey, 1934, p. 134) as I interact with my environment. Equilibrium, balance, and harmony come into being within the surface of

each canvas as the teacher-as-artist joins with the media to cultivate the elements of tension in a dialectic relationship.

“Thus we must say quite generally that nothing great in the world has been accomplished without passion.”  
(Hegel, cited in Kaufmann, 1965, p. 34)

When I talk about children and art making to my students in my art class, *Child Art and Teaching*, I feel the presence of my passion as I share my past experiences as an elementary art teacher. As I speak about and remember special moments of teaching, I feel myself swaying to the rhythm of my voice. My hands cannot hold still. They stretch and gesture, orchestrating the emotions that cannot be released with mere words. Hegel tells me that “this arousing of all feelings in us, this drawing of the heart through all the circumstances of life. . . is what is regarded . . . as the proper and supreme power of art” (cited in Karelis, 1979, p. 47) . Dewey says “craftsmanship to be artistic in the final sense must be ‘loving;’ it must care deeply for the subject matter upon which skill is exercised” (cited in Karelis, 1979, p. 47, 48) . But art is nothing, . . . except in relationship. Isn’t it wonderful that this supreme power of art needs me in order to exist? But it needs more than just my physical presence. Dewey (1934) says that “the artist’s work proceeds from . . . passionate excitement about the subject matter” (p. 64) . Meaningful experiences grow from human passion and compassion. “When excitement about subject matter goes deep, it stirs up a store of attitudes and meanings

derived from prior experiences" (Dewey, 1934, p. 65) . Past lived experiences "stick" within us and help shape the material of our present.

My daily involvement with the writing of this dissertation continues to remind me that I must qualify and support my statements. Whenever I talk about my weavings, paintings, sculpture, or collages I find myself redefining language again and again as I struggle to say that which cannot be fully said. And as I talk about conditions like aesthetics, spirituality, education, and art I must redefine their meanings. I cannot take for granted that these conditions of teaching are always positive and nurturing. They can also lead to negative and destructive ends. The duality of meanings of aesthetics was probably the one I struggled with the most. My "art for arts' sake" dusty philosophy came apart at the seams when I realized early on that aesthetics is a condition of active experience rather than a static thing. The soft words of M. C. Richards (1964, 1973) and Nel Noddings (1984) helped me see that in order for the moral design of aesthetics to work, the elements of care and respect must be present in relationship.

I have learned that my writing of this dissertation is informed by the daily comings and goings of my life. One morning this month I sat in Mcdonald and read excerpts from Buber's (1965) The Knowledge of Man. His words and thoughts filled me with awe as he talked about the meaning of words like partner, genuine dialogue, interhuman, and unfolding. My connection with the words of Buber that particular morning has informed the

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writing of this chapter. What I write today or any day will never be written the same way because each minute of our lives we are re-informed by our presentness. My experiences have informed me that regardless of how diverse the paintings or how actively involved I am with the compositions, they can never portray a whole and completed picture of me as a teacher. They can only show the “eternal middle” (Buber, 1958, p. 80) of who I am today.

#### To Every Thing There is a Season

I think of the concept of the seasons and its relationship to the process of my writing. To everything there is a pattern and a rhythm as we move from one thing to the next. Like the seasons there are no firsts and no lasts. The beginnings, middles, and endings flow from one to the next. Like the seasons we can usually tell what part we’re in even though pieces of other seasons often slip unsuspectingly into the normal flow. Like this year in early January the temperature soared unseasonably to 75 degrees and fooled my daffodil bulbs into thinking it was their time to peek out into the sunlight. Now they shiver on the seasonably cold mornings of early February.

The chapters of this dissertation like the turning seasons move one after the other often overlapping with fuzzy edges so it’s sometimes hard to tell where one stops and the next begins. Like the seasons traces of different chapters stick their heads up in unsuspecting chapters, visiting and revisiting the different parts of my journey. Like the seasons there is no best chapter.

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Like the seasons there is no certain way to predict how each chapter will unfold. I can speculate like the weatherman, but I can never guarantee the outcome. Like the seasons there is always the surprise element. What will the next page bring? Like the seasons I prepare for and respond differently to each one. And like the seasons my thoughts just keep coming as I gather and piece them within the design of this particular patchwork.

to every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose  
under the heaven. (Ecclesiastes 3:1)

This dissertation reminds me that there is a time, a place, a space for everything in my journey. This verse slows me down and quiets the coarse, obsessive “once and for all” threads in my thinking. It cautions me: “Beware of absolutes and be aware of the absurdity of hard and fast statements and the presence of superlatives in your writing and your teaching.” I remember now that when I use words like “best” and “highest” in my writing, I close the door to new possibility.

I feel the substance of my understanding altered and reshaped as I move through the seasons of these chapters. My work on this dissertation has taught me that it is the phenomenon of these turning seasons that keeps me grounded and planted firmly in the old so that I am free to experience the new. I’ve learned something new about the workings of this process called transformation. Notice how the word “form” sits rooted in its center. Its

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position reminds me that I must never throw away the form of my substance when I take on new shapes.

### There is Nothing New Under the Sun

My work has helped me weigh the balance and feel the tension of the relationship between the old and the new. Is there such a thing as something new, or is the new merely a rearrangement or a transformation of the old? Is it just a medley of old things put together in a new way? This concept of newness seems to take on the role of attitude or condition. It becomes a way of doing or thinking rather than a concrete thing. This new way of being with the old is like the meeting of old and young generations. The young are often impatient and short, but at the same time, they usually cherish and respect the presence of their elders. We are all influenced by the well-used and tattered wisdoms of our past.

I continue to learn more about the phenomenon of old and new by mixing the wisdom of John Dewey with the new art making experiences of my pre-service elementary teachers in ART 367, Child Art and Teaching. I help my anxious college students understand by returning again and again to Dewey's (1934) definition of imagination: "the conscious adjustment of the new and the old" and "the old and familiar made new" (p. 267). In this way I hope to reassure these non-art majors that past experiences rather than artistic skills are the thresholds to our creativity. I do not expect them to produce new things. Instead I ask them to revisit the old and familiar in their

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lives so that they can recreate new pictures from the used and worn threads of their past.

The sun also ariseth, and the sun goeth down, and hasteth to his place where he arose. . . . All the rivers run into the sea; yet the sea is not full; unto the place from whence the rivers come, thither they return again. All things are full of labor; man cannot utter it: the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing. The thing that hath be, it is that which shall be; and that which is done is that which shall be done: and there is no new thing under the sun. (Ecclesiastes 1: 5-9)

Like well worn tapes we replay the routineness of our lives day after day seldom taking time to keep track of the number of times we have brushed our teeth, stood under a hot shower, or taken our daily multiple vitamins. When I was first married, I briefly contemplated the number of dinners I would be making day after day for the next twenty years. I was overwhelmed by the thought of the thought. Now twenty-five years later these thousands of dinners have come and gone without a great deal of fretful energies on my behalf. Many have been bland and dull while others were filled with care and love. Many were prepared with little thought as I went through the motions of the task; others were treated as works of art. We repeat the rituals of our lives over and over, yet we are able to greet these daily tasks with varying degrees of acceptance that "there is no new thing under the sun" (Ecclesiastes 1:9) because with each meeting comes the possibility of a not yet. If I am not awake, I could miss the sound of the unfamiliar call embedded in the rhythm of the familiar patterns of my life.

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I return here to my definition of artist (Henri, 1923) as that part of us that looks beyond the surface of the routine and ordinary. When the artist in us is awake we begin to see an infinite number of ways to perceive the “no new thing under the sun.” Oscar Wilde shares his lighthearted explanation of how the Impressionist painters and poets saw and recreated the ever recurring climate of London:

Things are because we see them, and what we see, and how we see it, depends on the arts that have influenced us. To look at a thing is very different from seeing a thing. One does not see anything until one sees its beauty. Then, and then only does it come into existence. At present people see fogs, not because there are fogs, but because poets and painters have taught them the mysterious loveliness of such effects. There may have been fogs for centuries in London. I dare say there were, but no one saw them, and so we do not know anything about them. They did not exist until Art had invented them. (cited in Weber, 1960, pp. 187-188)

I can see through and want to open up the exclusive nature of this quote and remind us that we are all special kinds of poets and painters whenever we stop to notice something anew. The artist in us reshapes and reforms the repetitive substance of old, predictable molds. We hold these old things up to new light to see and celebrate that which has not yet been noticed. We remind ourselves that we can never satisfy our need to know more and see more in the substance of our daily lives. Ecclesiastes speaks clearly of the bottomless presence of our infinite resources: “all the rivers run into the sea; yet the sea is not full. . . . The eye [of man] is not satisfied with

seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing.” God created a universe that can always hold more. Like an earthen vessel the gravity of its shape and form holds us steady and keeps us centered so that we can reach toward the edges to refill and renew ourselves. The recurring patterns of our daily, monthly, seasonal, and yearly rituals hold us steady as we stretch in new directions or stay put in the comfort and safety of the familiar design.

As teachers we meet with our students day after day, week after week. From year to year we often teach the same material according to a pattern that is set firmly within the concrete of educational schedules and mandates, goals and objectives. This institutional matrix cries out for teachers-as-artists to breathe the life of renewal into the spaces of its repetitive structure. The old ways of doing and the new ways of trying come together in reciprocity. As I put this dissertation together I am continually reminded that the old and the new share a mutuality. Each day, each year can be a new meeting that helps our students reshape the material of their lives because it is surrounded and grounded by the comfort and stability of the sameness. Teachers-as-artists pick up “nothing new under the sun” each day, arranging and rearranging the medley of its resources like a floral bouquet as they create something anew.

Here at the completion of this juncture in my dissertation, I pause to behold what is before me. I place the metaphor of this floral bouquet next to my dog-eared stack of completed chapters. What do I notice about this assortment of words and images? I see that I have learned how to create an

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aesthetically pleasing arrangement of colorful flowers, and that I know how to put together a lot of sentences that will tell others much of what I know about a teacher-as-artist. I see that the institution of education has served me well since my first day of school forty-five years ago in Miss Mary's primary classroom. But something is missing in the sight of all these pretty flowers and the sound of educated words. Somehow what I really wanted to show and tell is not all said and done. Like Pippin in the Broadway musical, where is the "Ta DAH" and the grand finale? Where is the real meaning in these two very correct designs? What is it that I am missing? It is that part of me that is not there - that part of me that needs to keep glancing back "just in case." It is my knot of fear getting tangled again in the need to have and hold the ending before I get there; the part of me that needs to be reminded again and again that my visual artist must "body forth" (Buber, 1958, p. 10) and "walk by faith and not by sight" (2 Corinthians, 5: 7) .

### Creating or Forming Anew

When God breathed life into humankind, each one of us received the gift of renewal. We could never survive nor endure the repetitiveness of our lives without this spiritual source of replenishing energy that I call re-creation. The dictionary defines re-creation as "creating or forming anew." This word, anew, carries our hope and promise helping us meet and re-meet our endeavors again and again with the faith that there is always something more to be found. I heard this sense of positive expectancy in the voices of

the three teachers I interviewed in Chapter IV. M. C. Richards (1964) tells of her repeated efforts learning to center her clay on the wheel as a potter:

"I become weak, discouraged, exhausted, angry, frustrated, unhappy and confused. But someone within me is resolute and I try again. Within us lives a merciful being who helps us to our feet however many times we fall." (p. 8)

As both a visual artist and a teacher I know those painful, discouraging feelings Richards describes, and I too have experienced the miracle of being lifted out of the trenches of negative thought with hope filled glimpses of new beginnings. "This time will be different. This time it will work." The flexibility and resiliency of our human nature is tested every day as we witness ourselves and others bounce back and forth between the positive and negative tensions of our lives.

What is my re-creation as an artist, as a teacher, and as a researcher within the rhythm of this dissertation? What have I formed anew in my thinking? Like open vessels we spend our time collecting the things of our lives knowing that, like the ocean, we will never be filled by the rivers of our accumulated pasts as they mix and mingle with our present. How has the flow of my past experience informed the shape of my presentness? I can only speak of this temporary image that reveals who and where I am at this one moment of my journey, for as Buber (1958) reminds me, "this finding is not the end, but only the eternal middle of the way" (p. 80) .



### The Eternal Middle of the Way

I sit in David Purpel's office with tears running down my face as I experience the frightening but exhilarating rush of suddenly letting go of my dissertation and experiencing the design of living what I believe: Art making is not predetermined. It feels like the rug of certainty has been pulled out from under me, and I am suspended within the ineffable energy and process of my dissertation and me together in love. For several freeing moments I let go of needing to find the ending to my dissertation and wait to be found. Buber (1958) reminds me: "The Thou meets me through grace - it is not found by seeking" (p. 11) .

I reach outside myself to the wisdom of my mentors. Agnes de Mille tells me that whenever I truly experience something for the first time, I will not know (what to expect). Because without the mystery, the experience is already dead.

Living is a form of not being sure, not knowing what next or how. The moment you know how, you begin to die a little. The artist never entirely knows. We guess. We may be wrong, but we take leap after leap in the dark. (cited in Schaefer, 1990)

So how do I let go of my ending and leap? Buber (1958) reminds me again, "He who gives himself to it may withhold nothing of himself" (p. 10) . I must give my whole self to the unfinishedness of my composition without reservations or "what ifs." I must truly believe that the dissertation will finish with me and not be finished by me. How do I do this? I embrace the

aesthetic elements of the Eternal Thou: By faith, not sight. With love, not possession. With care, not control. These are the aesthetic elements that must live on and in between the lines of my dissertation and within the spaces of my art making as a teacher.

My dissertation like the earthen vessel of the sea holds and shows me so much more than my limited, one-dimensional vision of teacher-as-artist. I stand in the space of my ending realizing again that I must let go of my oneness and fall in love with my dissertation in order to hear the heartbeat of its whole message. The aesthetic of love lets me let go and enter into the mutuality of relationship. Like swimming laps in the pool, I must let go of the edge and suspend myself in order to move within the flow of the water. Like riding my bicycle I must take my other foot off the ground in order to experience the glide of balance and movement with my bike. When I fill up the surface of my paintings with my own need for certainty, my loving parts get lost and hidden underneath the orderly repetition. I get tangled in those parts of me that want to keep one hand on the edge of the pool or one foot on the ground.

Here I sit feeling a rush of newness that fills me with both fear and exhilaration. I must to let go of my notion of this dissertation and watch it become unto itself - an authentic work of art. I continue to learn over and over as a mother about this kind of aesthetic love in relationship whenever I struggle to trust in and let go of my children. In my husband's Mothers' Day

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poem two years ago his words reminds me that: "Giving life to your child is your first gift. Giving your child to life is your last" (Levine, 1993) . In all the parts of my life with my children and my students, "relation is mutual. My Thou affects me, as I affect it" (Buber, 1958, p. 15). Loving is releasing myself control and suspending myself in the affects of mutual experience.

Several times I have taken part in outdoor experiences that nurture the aesthetics of care in group interaction. The one exercise I have never been able to do is the trust fall. I cannot let go and give myself the exhilarating freedom of being received into the interlocking care of the group. But that feeling is what I hold a glimmer of in this space of my writing. When I let go and fall in love with my dissertation I give and receive the energy of reciprocity. "Relation is reciprocity. . . . Our students teach us, our works form us. . . . We live in the currents of universal reciprocity" (Buber, 1970, p. 67) . When I let go of my tight grip in my art making, the energy within and around me is free to move and come together as a whole.

Aesthetic works of art and teaching can be carefully and painstakingly designed and rendered, but the order and outward form of their appearance is not enough without the presence of loving relationship.

If I have all the eloquence of men or of angels, but speak without love, I am simply a gong booming or a cymbal clashing. . . . without love, then I am nothing at all . . . . In short there are three things that last: faith, hope and love; and the greatest of these is love. ( 1 Corinthians 13 )

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### Teacher-as-Loving-Artist

Love informs beauty in the aesthetic order of re-creation. I like this word, inform, as it both tells about and shapes the nature of our substance. I am informed by my past experiences. They both tell my past and shape my future in the space of the middle. As I grow older and fret about my unwanted wrinkles, my husband lovingly reassures me that these new lines on my face become me when I forget and lose my (self conscious) self into the mutual relationship of my smile. My youthful skin has begun to fade into the background allowing my new wrinkles to inform me with the necessity and inevitability of change as I age and move through the wholeness of my life. I like the way Hegel talks about this same phenomenon:

The bud disappears as the blossom bursts forth, and one could say that the bud is refuted by the blossom. [and then] . . . the fruit supplants the blossom as the truth of the plant. . . . Their fluid nature makes them elements of an organic unity in which they do not conflict and in which one is as necessary as the other, and it is only this equal necessity that constitutes the life of the whole. (cited in Kaufmann, 1965, p. 370) [Hegel goes on to speak of a powerful concept, using the German word]: "aufheben" [which] exhibits its true double meaning. . . . it negates and at the same time preserves. (cited in Kaufmann, 1965, p. 393)

And now, at the ending of this dissertation, new wrinkles have supplanted and informed my beloved title, Teacher-as-Artist, and I must smile, accept, and celebrate the organic nature of its and my growth. "Hegel scorns those who, at the first differentiation when they find that they are far

from home, turn back instead of persevering, pushing on the inquiry and comprehending the truth" (cited in Kaufmann, 1965, p. 376) .

This is a difficult bridge for me to cross. David Purpel waves me on, saying, "Not to worry. Don't be shy, speak up, tell us about it." And I keep lingering on this side of the ending, forgetting that if I let go and give my bud up to the organic unity of the whole, the blossom will burst forth, not only changing but preserving my teacher-as-artist. So I let go and cross the bridge, and what do I tell?

The aesthetics of beauty cannot stand alone. Beauty needs care needs compassion needs faith needs love in the aesthetic order of re-creation. Aesthetics reveals the order or arrangement of things in relation to one another. In order to be whole, aesthetics must be informed with the mutuality of care and love that is both given and received. Aesthetics cannot exist within the space of oneness. Oneness is a void, a vacuum.

As an artist when I work with my clay I must give myself up to the making of the form. My clay and I become a new beingness together. Dewey (1934) speaks of the aesthetic as the actual shared experience. The new form created, therefore, is a product of the loving relationship between the clay and me. In a true aesthetic relationship, the experience or subject matter is one informed with love. By this I mean that my clay and I show our respect in one another by pushing and pulling each other to our limits. When I encounter my students as a loving artist, I give myself up to the re-creation of

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a loving relationship. My students and I meet in the I-Thou space, pushing and pulling one another to our limits as we become a new beingness together. We must challenge, care for, nurture, disagree with, listen to, and acknowledge one another's truths enough to endure and welcome our likenesses and differences.

This spiritual kind of love I speak of is an intrinsic element of Martin Buber's I-Thou relationship. It is grounded in the pages of the New Testament where I return again to hear the words of Matthew: "where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in their midst of them" (Mt. 18: 19-20). The presence of God cannot come forth in the spaces of oneness. Relationship is the spiritual substance of love as love is the spiritual substance of aesthetics.

My Teacher-as-Artist title fades into the background, lovingly preserved as it informs and celebrates the blossoming forth of this canvas of my dissertation. My picture of aesthetics has not changed as much as it has been more fully revealed. When I say to my students, "I have confidence in you," I am affirming the presence of the spirit of God in both of us. I am saying, "We all have love to recover and bring to the wholeness of our relationship. We all have within us the potential and the response-ability (Huebner, 1984) to give to and receive within the design of our classroom-as-painting.

Aristotle's definition of aesthetics tells us that beauty blossoms forth from organic unity, and unity relies on every member of the community contributing to the quality of the whole. I want to look at this word contribute closer. It comes from the Latin word, "*contribuere*" meaning to unite, and its current dictionary meaning is "to give up a share or to participate." I think our capitalist culture has turned this word away from its original intent, that of giving of myself, to a more materialistic, impersonal giving of money and things to causes that are relatively distant from us. This is why it is so important for teachers to recover the aesthetic of love as we reshape and redefine the substance of unity and wholeness in our classrooms. If we as teachers inform our classrooms with loving relationship, the element of beauty will blossom forth from the buds of mutuality and reciprocity.

I have spoken of the aesthetic experience of working with our clay and with my students, and I struggled earlier in this chapter to allow my dissertation to finish with me and not be finished by me. This short, simple word, "with," comes from the Old English, *withthe*, meaning the twig of a willow. A willow twig is a tough, flexible branch used in binding things; it serves to bind or tie. This definition draws me back and ties into my fascination with weaving in the mid 1980s. During that time I created sculptural weavings that spoke of relationship in the art of teaching - human-sized sculptures that I formed with tree branches, reed, and assorted fibers. These organic, vessel-like forms helped me begin to "body forth"

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(Buber, 1958, p. 10) and answer this ineffable, quiet whisper that called me from my art room, opening my doors and windows toward relationship with the otherness in my life and my teaching. No one member of the classroom can stand alone. The teachers need the students need the subject matter needs the media needs the (class)room to come to know with one another in the loving aesthetic of teaching. Heschel (1973) says, "It is impossible to find truth without being in love (p. 43) . Purpel says, "Beauty is love. That's all you need to know" (in conversation, March, 1995) .

Pause . . .



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